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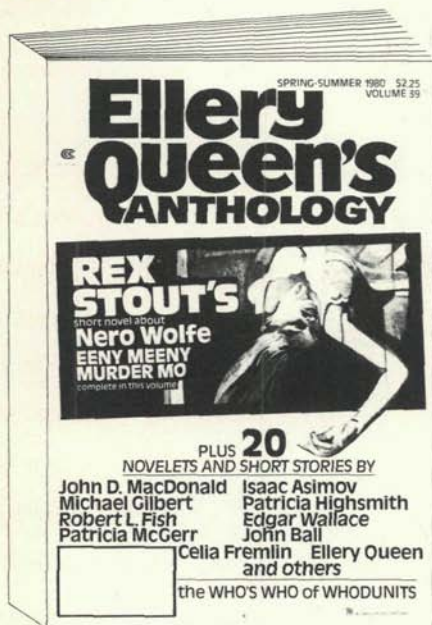
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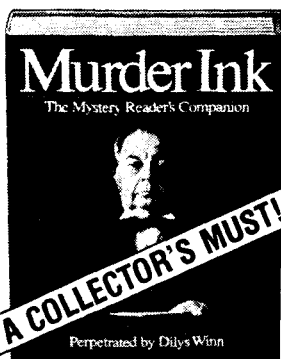
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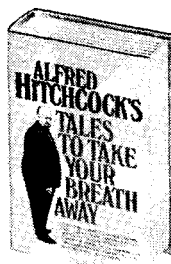
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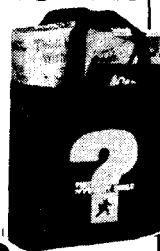
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64 MILLION TRILLION COMBINATIONS

by **ISAAC ASIMOV**

Since it was Thomas Trumbull who was going to act as host for the Black Widowers that month, he did not, as was his custom, arrive at the last minute, gasping for his preprandial drink.

There he was, in early dignity, conferring with Henry, that peerless waiter, on the details of the menu for the evening, and greeting each of the others as he arrived.

Mario Gonzalo, who came last, took off his light overcoat with care, shook it gently, as though to remove the dust of the taxicab, and hung it up in the cloakroom. He came back, rubbing his hands, and said, "There's an autumn chill in the air. I think summer's over."

"Good riddance," called out Emmanuel Rubin, from where he stood conversing with Geoffrey Avalon and James Drake.

"I'm not complaining," Gonzalo called back. Then, to Trumbull, "Hasn't your guest got here yet?"

Trumbull said distinctly, as though tired of explaining, "I have not brought a guest."

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"Oh?" said Gonzalo blankly. There was nothing absolutely irregular about that. The rules of the Black Widowers did not require a guest, although not to have one was most unusual. "Well, I guess that's all right."

"It's more than all right," said Geoffrey Avalon, who had just drifted in their direction, gazing down from his straight-backed height of 74 inches. His thick graying eyebrows hunched over his eyes and he said, "At least that guarantees us one meeting in which we can talk aimlessly and relax."

Gonzalo said, "I don't know about that. I'm used to the problems that come up. I don't think any of us will feel comfortable without one. Besides, what about Henry?"

He looked at Henry as he spoke and Henry allowed a discreet smile to cross his unlined, sixtyish face. "Please don't be concerned, Mr. Gonzalo. It will be my pleasure to serve the meal and attend the conversation even if there is nothing of moment to puzzle us."

"Well," said Trumbull, scowling, his crisply waved hair startlingly white over his tanned face, "you won't have that pleasure, Henry. I'm the one with the problem and I hope someone can solve it, especially *you*, Henry."

Avalon's lips tightened, "Now by Beelzebub's brazen bottom, Tom, you might have given us *one* old-fashioned—"

Trumbull shrugged and turned away, and Roger Halsted said to Avalon in his soft voice, "What's that Beelzebub bit? Where'd you pick that up?"

Avalon looked pleased, "Oh, well, Manny is writing some sort of adventure yarn set in Elizabeth's England—Elizabeth First, of course—and it seems—"

Rubin, having heard the magic sound of his name, approached and said, "It's a sea story."

Halsted said, "Are you tired of mysteries?"

"It's a mystery also," said Rubin, his eyes flashing behind the thick lenses of his glasses. "What makes you think you can't have a mystery angle to *any* kind of story?"

"In any case," said Avalon, "Manny has one character forever swearing alliteratively and never the same words twice and he needs a few more resounding oaths. Beelzebub's brazen bottom is good, I think."

"Or Mammon's marvelous monuments," said Halsted.

Trumbull said violently, "There you are! If I don't come up with a problem that will occupy us in worthwhile fashion and engage our

Henry's superlative mind, the whole evening will degenerate into stupid triplets—by Tutankhamen's tin trumpet."

"It gets you after a while," grinned Rubin, unabashed.

"Well, get off it," said Trumbull. "Is dinner ready, Henry?"

"Yes, it is, Mr. Trumbull."

"All right, then. If you idiots keep this alliteration up for more than two minutes I'm walking out, host or no host."

The table seemed empty with only six around it, and conversation seemed a bit subdued with no guest to sparkle for.

Gonzalo, who sat next to Trumbull, said, "I ought to draw a cartoon of you for our collection since you're your own guest, so to speak." He looked up at the long list of guest-caricatures that lined the wall in rank and file. "We're going to run out of space in a couple of years."

"Then don't bother with me," said Trumbull sourly, "and we can always make space by burning those foolish scrawls."

"Scrawls!" Gonzalo seemed to debate within himself briefly on the possibility of taking offense. Then he compromised by saying, "You seem to be in a foul mood, Tom."

"I seem so because I am. I'm in the situation of the Chaldean wise men facing Nebuchadnezzar."

Avalon leaned over from across the table. "Are you talking about the book of Daniel, Tom?"

"That's where it is, isn't it?"

Gonzalo said, "Pardon me, but I didn't have my Bible lesson yesterday. What are these wise men?"

"Tell him, Jeff," said Trumbull. "Pontificating is your job."

Avalon said, "It's not pontificating to tell a simple tale. If you would rather—"

Gonzalo said, "I'd rather you did, Jeff. You do it much more authoritatively."

"Well," said Avalon, "it's Rubin, not I, who was once a boy preacher, but I'll do my poor best. —The second chapter of the book of Daniel tells that Nebuchadnezzar was once troubled by a bad dream and he sent for his Chaldean wise men for an interpretation. The wise men offered to do so at once as soon as they heard the dream but Nebuchadnezzar couldn't remember the dream, only that he had been disturbed by it. He reasoned, however, that if wise men could interpret a dream, they could figure out the dream, too, so he ordered them to tell him both the dream *and* the interpretation.

When they couldn't do this, he very reasonably—by the standards of Oriental potentates—ordered them all killed. Fortunately for them, Daniel, a captive Jew in Babylon, could do the job."

Gonzalo said, "And that's your situation, too, Tom?"

"In a way. I have a problem that involves a cryptogram—but I don't have the cryptogram. I have to work out the cryptogram."

"Or you'll be killed?" asked Rubin.

"No. If I fail, I won't be killed, but it won't do me any good, either."

Gonzalo said, "No wonder you didn't feel it necessary to bring a guest. Tell us all about it."

"Before the brandy?" said Avalon, scandalized.

"Tom's host," said Gonzalo defensively. "If he wants to tell us now—"

"I don't," said Trumbull. "We'll wait for the brandy as we always do, and I'll be my own griller, if you don't mind."

When Henry was pouring the brandy, Trumbull rang his spoon against his water glass and said, "Gentlemen, I will dispense with the first question by admitting openly that I cannot justify my existence. Without pretending to go on by question-and-answer, I will simply state the problem. You are free to ask questions, but for God's sake, don't get me off on any wild-goose chases. This is serious."

Avalon said, "Go ahead, Tom. We will do our best."

Trumbull said, with a certain weariness, "It involves a fellow named Pochik. I've got to tell you a little about him in order for you to understand the problem but, as is usual in these cases, I hope you don't mind if I tell you only what is relevant.

"In the first place, he's from eastern Europe, from somewhere in Slovenia, I think, and he came here at the age of fourteen. He taught himself English, went to night school and to University Extension, working every step of the way. He worked as a waiter for ten years, while he was taking his various courses, and you know what that means.—Sorry, Henry."

Henry said tranquilly, "It is not necessarily a pleasant occupation. Not everyone waits on the Black Widowers, Mr. Trumbull."

"Thank you, Henry. That's very diplomatic of you.—However, Pochik wouldn't have made it if it weren't plain from the start that he was a mathematical wizard. He was the kind of young man that no mathematics professor in his right mind wouldn't have moved heaven and earth to keep in school. He was their claim to a mark

in the history books—that they had taught Pochik. Do you understand?”

Avalon said, “We understand, Tom.”

Trumbull went on, “At least, that’s what they tell me. He’s working for the government now, which is where I come in. They tell me he’s something else. They tell me he’s in a class by himself, that he can do things no one else can, that they’ve got to have him. I don’t even know what project he’s working on, but they say they’ve got to have him.”

Rubin said, “Well, they’ve got him, haven’t they? He hasn’t been kidnaped and hijacked back across the Iron Curtain, has he?”

“No, no,” said Trumbull, “nothing like that. It’s a lot more irritating. Look, apparently a great mathematician can be an idiot in every other respect.”

“Literally an idiot?” asked Avalon. “Usually *idiots savants* have remarkable memories and can play remarkable tricks in computation, but that is far from being any kind of mathematician, let alone a great one.”

“No, nothing like that, either,” Trumbull was perspiring and paused to mop his forehead. “I mean, he’s childish. He’s not really learned in anything but mathematics and that’s all right. Mathematics is what we want out of him. The trouble is that he feels backward; he feels stupid. Damn it, he feels inferior, and when he feels *too* inferior, he stops working and hides in his room.”

Gonzalo said, “So what’s the problem? Everyone just has to keep telling him how great he is all the time.”

“He’s dealing with other mathematicians and they’re almost as crazy as he is. One of them, Sandino, hates being second best and every once in a while he gets Pochik into a screaming fit. He’s got a sense of humor, this Sandino, and he likes to call out to Pochik, ‘Hey, waiter, bring the check.’ Pochik can’t take it.”

Drake said, “Read this Sandino the riot act. Tell him you’ll dismember him if he tries anything like that again.”

“They did,” said Trumbull, “or at least as far as they quite dared to. They don’t want to lose Sandino either. In any case, the horseplay stopped, but something much worse happened.—You see, there’s something called, if I’ve got it right, Goldbach’s conjecture.”

Roger Halsted galvanized into a position of sharp interest at once. “Sure,” he said. “Very famous.”

“You know about it?” said Trumbull.

Halsted stiffened. “I may just teach algebra to junior high-school

students, but yes, I know about Goldbach's conjecture."

"All right, I apologize. It was stupid of me," said Trumbull. "And since you're a mathematician, you can be temperamental, too. Anyway, can you explain Goldbach's conjecture? Because I'm not sure I can."

"Actually," said Halsted, "it's very simple. Back in 1742, I think, a Russian mathematician, Christian Goldbach, stated that he believed every even number greater than 2 could be written as the sum of two primes. A prime is any number that can't be divided evenly by any other number other than itself and 1. For instance, $4 = 2 + 2$; $6 = 3 + 3$; $8 = 3 + 5$; $10 = 3 + 7$; $12 = 5 + 7$; and so on, as far as you want to go."

Gonzalo said, "So what's the big deal?"

"Goldbach wasn't able to prove it. And in the two hundred and something years since his time, neither has anyone else. The greatest mathematicians haven't been able to show that it's true."

Gonzalo said, "So?"

Halsted said patiently, "Every even number that has ever been checked always works out to be the sum of two primes. They've gone awfully high and mathematicians are convinced the conjecture is true—but no one can *prove* it."

Gonzalo said, "If they can't find any exceptions, doesn't *that* prove it?"

"No, because there are always numbers higher than the highest we've checked, and besides, we don't know all the prime numbers and can't; and the higher we go, the harder it is to tell whether a particular number is prime or not. What is needed is a *general* proof that tells us we don't have to look for exceptions because there just aren't any. It bothers mathematicians that a problem can be stated so simply and seems to work out, too, and yet that it can't be proved."

Trumbull had been nodding his head. "All right, Roger, all right. We get it. But tell me, does it *matter*? Does it really matter to anyone who isn't a mathematician whether Goldbach's conjecture is true or not, whether there are any exceptions or not?"

"No," said Halsted. "Not to anyone who isn't a mathematician; but to anyone who is and who manages either to prove or disprove Goldbach's conjecture, there is an immediate and permanent niche in the mathematical Hall of Fame."

Trumbull shrugged. "There you are. What Pochik's really doing is of great importance. I'm not sure whether it's for the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, NASA, or what, but it's vital.

What *he's* interested in, however, is Goldbach's conjecture, and for that he's been using a computer."

"To try higher numbers?" asked Gonzalo.

Halsted said promptly, "No, that would do no good. These days, though, you can use computers on some pretty recalcitrant problems. It doesn't yield an elegant solution, but it is a solution. If you can reduce a problem to a finite number of possible situations—say, one million—you can program a computer to try every one of them. If every one of them checks out as they're supposed to, then you have your proof. They recently solved the four-color mapping problem that way—a problem as well known and as resistant as Goldbach's conjecture."

"Good," said Trumbull, "then that's what Pochik's been doing. Apparently he had worked out the solution to a particular lemma. Now what's a lemma?"

Halsted said, "It's a part-way solution. If you're climbing a mountain peak and you set up stations at various levels, the lemmas are analogous to those stations, and the solution to the mountain peak."

"If he solves the lemma, will he solve the conjecture?"

"Not necessarily," said Halsted, "any more than you'll climb the mountain if you reach a particular station on the slopes. But if you *don't* solve the lemma, you're not likely to solve the problem, at least not from that direction."

"All right, then," said Trumbull, sitting back. "Well, Sandino came up with the lemma first and sent it in for publication."

Drake was bent over the table, listening closely. He said, "Tough luck for Pochik."

Trumbull said, "Except that Pochik says it wasn't luck. He claims Sandino doesn't have the brains for it and couldn't have taken the steps independently; that it is asking too much of coincidence."

Drake said, "That's a serious charge. Has Pochik any evidence?"

"No, of course not. The only way Sandino could have stolen it from Pochik would have been to tap the computer for Pochik's data, and Pochik himself says Sandino couldn't have done that."

"Why not?" said Avalon.

"Because," said Trumbull, "Pochik used a code word. The code word has to be used to alert the computer to a particular person's questioning. Without that code word, everything that went in *with* the code word is safely locked away."

Avalon said, "It could be that Sandino learned the code word."

"Pochik says that's impossible," said Trumbull. "He was afraid of

theft, particularly with respect to Sandino, and he never wrote down the code word, never used it except when he was alone in the computer room. What's more, he used a code word that was fourteen letters long, he says. Millions of trillions of possibilities, of combinations, he says. No one could have guessed it, he says."

Rubin said, "What does Sandino say?"

"He says he worked it out himself. He rejects the claim of theft as the ravings of a madman. Frankly, one could argue that he's right."

Drake said, "Well, let's consider. Sandino is a good mathematician and he's innocent till proved guilty. Pochik has nothing to support his claim, and Pochik actually denies that Sandino could possibly have gotten the code word which is the only way the theft could possibly have taken place. I think Pochik has to be wrong and Sandino right."

Trumbull said, "I *said* one could argue that Sandino's right, but the point is that Pochik won't work. He's sulking in his room and reading poetry and he says he will never work again. He says Sandino has robbed him of his immortality and life means nothing to him without it."

Gonzalo said, "If you need this guy so badly, can you talk Sandino into letting Pochik have his lemma?"

"Sandino won't make the sacrifice and we can't make him unless we have reason to think that fraud was involved. If we get any evidence to that effect, we can lean on him hard enough to squash him flat.—But now listen, I think it's possible Sandino *did* steal it."

Avalon said, "How?"

"By getting the code word. If I knew what the code word was, I'm sure I could figure out a logical way in which Sandino could have found it out or worked it out. Pochik, however, simply won't let me have the code word. He screamed at me when I asked. I explained why, but he said it was impossible. He said Sandino did it some other way—but there is no other way."

Avalon said, "Pochik wants an interpretation but he won't tell you the dream, and you have to figure out the dream first and then give him the interpretation."

"Exactly! Like the Chaldean wise men."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to try to do what Sandino must have done. I'm going to try to figure out what the fourteen-letter code word is and present it to Pochik. If I'm right, then it will be clear that what I could do,

Sandino could do, and that the lemma was very likely stolen."

There was a silence around the table and then Gonzalo said, "Do you think you can do it, Tom?"

"I don't think so. That's why I've brought the problem here. I want us all to try. I told Pochik I would call him before ten thirty P.M. tonight"—Trumbull looked at his watch—"with the code word just to show him it *could* be broken. I presume he's waiting at the phone."

Avalon said, "And if we don't get it?"

"Then we have no reasonable way of supposing the lemma was stolen and no ethical way of trying to force it away from Sandino. But at least we'll be no worse off."

Avalon said, "Then you go first. You've clearly been thinking about it longer than we have, and it's your line of work."

Trumbull cleared his throat. "All right. My reasoning is that if Pochik doesn't write the thing down, then he has to remember it. There are some people with trick memories and such a talent is fairly common among mathematicians. However, even great mathematicians don't always have the ability to remember long strings of disjointed symbols, and on questioning his coworkers, it would seem quite certain that Pochik's memory is an ordinary one. He can't rely on being able to remember the code unless it's easy to remember.

"That would limit it to some common phrase or some regular progression that you couldn't possibly forget. Suppose it were ALBERT EINSTEIN for instance. That's fourteen letters and there would be no fear of forgetting it. Or SIR ISAAC NEWTON, or ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP, or, for that matter, NMLKJIHGFEDCBA. If Pochik used something like this, it could be that Sandino tried various obvious combinations and one of them worked."

Drake said, "If that's true, then we haven't a prayer of solving the problem. Sandino might have tried any number of different possibilities over a period of months. One of them finally worked. If he got it by hit-and-miss over a long time, we have no chance in getting the right one in an hour and a half, without even trying any of them on the computer."

"There's that, of course," said Trumbull, "and it may well be that Sandino had been working on the problem for months. Sandino pulled the waiter routine on Pochik last June, and Pochik, out of his mind, screamed at him that he would show him when his proof was ready. Sandino may have put this together with Pochik's frequent use of the computer and gotten to work. Yes, he may have

had months to do it."

"Did Pochik say something on that occasion that gave the code word away?" asked Avalon.

"Pochik swears all he said was 'I'll show you when the proof is ready.' But who knows? Would Pochik remember his own exact words when he was beside himself?"

Halsted said, "I'm surprised that Pochik didn't try to beat up this Sandino."

Trumbull said, "You wouldn't be surprised if you knew them. Sandino is built like a football player and Pochik weighs one hundred pounds with his clothes on."

Gonzalo said suddenly, "What's this Pochik's first name?"

Trumbull said, "Vladimir."

Gonzalo paused a while, with all eyes on him, and then he said, "I knew it. VLADIMIR POCHIK has fourteen letters. He used his own name."

Rubin said, "Ridiculous. It would be the first combination anyone would try."

"Sure, the purloined letter syndrome. It would be so obvious that no one would think to use it. Ask him."

Trumbull shook his head. "No. I can't believe he'd use that."

Rubin said thoughtfully, "Did you say he was sitting in his room reading poetry?"

"Yes."

"Is that a passion of his? Poetry? I thought you said that outside mathematics he was not particularly educated."

Trumbull said sarcastically, "You don't have to be a Ph.D. to read poetry."

Avalon said mournfully, "You would have to be an idiot to read modern poetry."

"That's a point," said Rubin. "Does Pochik read contemporary poetry?"

Trumbull said, "It never occurred to me to ask. When I visited him, he was reading from a book of Wordsworth's poetry, but that's all I can say."

"That's enough," said Rubin. "If he likes Wordsworth, then he doesn't like contemporary poetry. No one can read Wordsworth for fun and like the stuff they turn out these days."

"So? What difference does it make?" asked Trumbull.

"The older poetry with its rhyme and rhythm is easy to remember and it could be used for code words. The code word could be a four-

teen-letter passage from one of Wordsworth's poems, possibly a common one: LONELY AS A CLOUD has fourteen letters. Or any fourteen-letter combinations from such lines as 'The child is father to the man' or 'trailing clouds of glory' or 'Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.'—Or maybe from some other poet of the same era."

Avalon said, "Even if we restrict ourselves to passages from the classic and romantic poets, that's a huge field to guess from."

Drake said, "I repeat. It's an impossible task. We don't have the time to try them all. And we can't tell one from another without trying."

Halsted said, "It's even more impossible than you think, Jim. I don't think the code word was in English words."

Trumbull said, frowning, "You mean he used his native language?"

"No, I mean he used a random collection of letters. You say that Pochik said the code word was unbreakable because there were millions of trillions of possibilities in a 14-letter combination. Well, suppose that the first letter could be any of the 26 in the alphabet, and the second letter could be any of the 26, and the third letter, and so on. In that case, the total number of combinations would be $26 \times 26 \times 26$, and so on. You would have to get the product of fourteen 26's multiplied together and the result would be"—he took out his pocket calculator and manipulated it for a while—"about 64 million trillion different possibilities.

"Now, if you used an English phrase or a phrase in any reasonable European language, most of the letter combinations simply don't occur. You're not going to have an HGF or a QXZ or an LLLLC. If we include only *possible* letter combinations in words, then we might have trillions of possibilities, probably less, but certainly not millions of trillions. Pochik, being a mathematician, wouldn't say 'millions of trillions' unless he meant exactly that, so I expect the code word is a random set of letters."

Trumbull said, "He doesn't have the kind of memory—"

Halsted said, "Even a normal memory will handle fourteen random letters if you stick to it long enough."

Gonzalo said, "Wait a while. If there are only so many combinations, you could use a computer. The computer could try every possible combination and stop at the one that unlocks it."

Halsted said, "You don't realize how big a number 64 million trillion really is, Mario. Suppose you arranged to have the computer

test a billion different combinations every second. It would take two thousand solid years of work, day and night, to test all the possible combinations."

Gonzalo said, "But you wouldn't have to test them all. The right one might come up in the first two hours. Maybe the code was AAAAAAAAAAAAAA and it happened to be the first one the computer tried."

"Very unlikely," said Halsted. "He wouldn't use a solid-A code any more than he would use his own name. Besides Sandino is enough of a mathematician not to start a computer-attempt he would know could take a hundred lifetimes."

Rubin said thoughtfully, "If he did use a random code, I bet it wasn't truly random."

Avalon said, "How do you mean, Manny?"

"I mean, if he doesn't have a superlative memory, and he didn't write it down, how could he go over and over it in his mind in order to memorize it? Just repeat fourteen random letters to yourself and see if you can be confident of repeating them again in the exact order immediately afterward. And even if he *had* worked out a random collection of letters and managed to memorize it, it's clear he had very little self-confidence in anything except mathematical reasoning. Could he face the possibility of not being able to retrieve his own information because he had forgotten the code?"

"He could start all over," said Trumbull.

"With a new random code? And forget that, too?" said Rubin. "No, even if the code word seems random, I'll bet Pochik has some foolproof way of remembering it, and if we can figure out the foolproof way, we'd have the answer. In fact, if Pochik would give us the code word, we'd see how he memorized it and then see how Sandino broke the code."

Trumbull said, "And if Nebuchadnezzar would only have remembered the dream, the wise men could have interpreted it. Pochik won't give us the code word, and if we work it with hindsight, we'll never be sufficiently sure that Sandino cracked it without hindsight.—All right, we'll have to give it up."

"It may not be necessary to give it up," said Henry suddenly. "I think—"

All turned to Henry expectantly. "Yes, Henry," said Avalon.

"I have a wild guess. It may be all wrong. Perhaps it might be possible to call up Mr. Pochik, Mr. Trumbull, and ask him if the code word is WEALTMDITEBIAT," said Henry.

Trumbull said, "What?"

Halsted said, his eyebrows high, "That's some wild guess, all right. Why that?"

Gonzalo said, "It makes no sense."

No one could recall ever having seen Henry blush, but he was distinctly red now. He said, "If I may be excused. I don't wish to explain my reasoning until the combination is tried. If I am wrong, I would appear too foolish.—And, on second thought, I don't urge it be tried."

Trumbull said, "No, we have nothing to lose. Could you write down that letter combination, Henry?"

"I have already done so, sir."

Trumbull looked at it, walked over to the phone in the corner of the room, and dialed. He waited for four rings, which could be clearly heard in the breath-holding silence of the room. There was then a click, and a sharp, high-pitched, "Hello?"

Trumbull said, "Dr. Pochik? Listen. I'm going to read some letters to you—No, Dr. Pochik, I'm not saying I've worked out the code. This is an exper—it's an experiment, sir. We may be wrong—No, I can't say how—Listen, W, E, A, L—Oh, good God." He placed his hand over the mouthpiece. "The man is having a fit."

"Because it's right or because it's wrong?" asked Rubin.

"I don't know." Trumbull put the phone back to his ear. "Dr. Pochik, are you there?—Dr. Pochik?—The rest is" he consulted the paper "T, M, D, I, T, E, B, I, A, T." He listened. "Yes, sir, I think Sandino cracked it, too, the same way we did. We'll have a meeting with you and Dr. Sandino, and we'll settle everything. Yes—please, Dr. Pochik, we will do our best."

Trumbull hung up, heaved an enormous sigh, then said, "Sandino is going to think Jupiter fell on him.—All right, Henry, but if you don't tell us how you got that, you won't have to wait for Jupiter. I will kill you personally."

"No need, Mr. Trumbull," said Henry. "I will tell you at once. I merely listened to all of you. Mr. Halsted pointed out it would have to be some random collection of letters. Mr. Rubin said, backing my own feeling in the matter, that there had to be some system of remembering in that case. Mr. Avalon, early in the evening, was playing the game of alliterative oaths which pointed up the importance of initial letters. You yourself mentioned Mr. Pochik's liking for romantic poetry like that of Wordsworth.

"It occurred to me then that fourteen is the number of lines in a

sonnet, and if we took the initial letters of each line of some sonnet we would have an apparently random collection of fourteen letters that could not be forgotten as long as the sonnet was memorized or could, at worst, be looked up.

"The question was: which sonnet? It was very likely to be a well-known one, and Wordsworth had written some that were. In fact, Mr. Rubin mentioned the first line of one of them: 'Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour.' That made me think of Milton, and it came to me that it *had* to be his sonnet 'On His Blindness,' which as it happens I know by heart. Please note the first letters of the successive lines. It goes:

*When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: 'God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest . . ."*

Henry paused and said softly, "I think it is the most beautiful sonnet in the language, Shakespeare's not excepted, but that was not the reason I felt it must hold the answer. It was that Dr. Pochik had been a waiter and was conscious of it, and I am one, which is why I have memorized the sonnet. A foolish fancy, no doubt, but the last line, which I have not quoted, and which is perhaps among the most famous lines Milton ever wrote—"

"Go ahead, Henry," said Rubin. "Say it!"

"Thank you, sir," said Henry, and then he said, solemnly,
They also serve who only stand and wait.

"Q"

a **NEW** short story by

ETTA REVESZ

His name was Pierre. He came from a small town in Maine and wound up in the Los Angeles Police Department. Los Angeles—next door to the glamor capital of the world whose famous movie stars, past and present, exert so great an influence on all our lives, in their own astrological way . . . but, as good Will has told us, "the fault is not in our stars" . . .

THE LOOK-ALIKE MURDERS

by **ETTA REVESZ**

I was seven years old when my mother told me my father had looked like Adolphe Menjou. See, he died before I was two, so I didn't remember him at all. My parents married late in life and when I was born, my father was over 50. His death left my mother with a small son and no money, which made it hard on her. It was a closed chapter in her life and she didn't talk about it much or have any pictures around of him.

That made it hard on me. I hated not having a father like the other boys. I felt left out, different. Like I wasn't as good as the others. So I pestered my mother. That's when she told me he looked like Adolphe Menjou, which didn't mean a thing to me until she said he was an old-time movie star. Then, from the day I read his name in a television program, I'd watch every old-movie rerun he was in. That's how I really got to know my father.

One afternoon my mother sent me to our town's only drug store, which really was a general store. While I waited for a prescription to be filled, I picked up a billfold. When I flipped it open I saw the picture. It was glossy and had the actor's name written across the side—Adolphe Menjou! I slipped it out and took it home. After I

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stuck it on my dresser mirror with tape, I wrote *Dad* under it.

We lived in Gilmore, Maine, 50 miles inland from Portland. It was a ragged town that depended on a shoe mill which made moccasins. That's where my mother worked. The factory, along with two summer camps for rich kids up from Boston or New York, were the only places to get jobs.

There wasn't any money for college the year I graduated from Gilmore High School, so when my mother's brother wrote and said I should come out to Los Angeles, I did. He said that California sends you to college free. I was glad to get away from Gilmore, and after I got settled at my uncle's house, I started Junior College. It took me longer than I expected, what with one thing and another, and my uncle's wife got tired of feeding me. My uncle was a cop, so one day he came home and said I should apply for the Police Training Academy.

"You ain't the brightest," he told me, "but you got the looks, what you being six foot and halfway human-looking."

To my uncle that meant I didn't have long hair or a beard, and wasn't a health-food nut. Yet the idea of being a policeman didn't appeal to me. The buddy system wasn't my bag. Fundamentally, I'm a loner. Lots of New Englanders are close—the long hard winters, I guess. You never hear of a talkative Eskimo, do you?

"I'm not the type," I told my uncle. "All that shooting and stuff. I don't think I can make it."

"Hell, the Chief'll dust off your chair before you sit down to fill out your application. Any two-legged animal that can read and write and don't lisp is in like Frank Sinatra."

What Sinatra had to do with the Los Angeles Police Department, I don't know, except my uncle has no patience with anyone who isn't "regular." To him Sinatra is all man and the American Dream.

Arguing was no good—I just couldn't buck him. The next day he instructed me what to do.

"You go down to Personnel and tell Maggie you're Harold Fellowship's nephew and you want to see Lieutenant Belson. Belson'll take care of you."

Yeah, that's my uncle's name—Fellowship. By the way, my name is Pierre. That's right. Not Peter, or Pete. Right from the start my old man must of hated me! Imagine hanging a moniker like Pierre on a kid!

Anyway, I passed the tests and got taken on the force. Now, to some people the word "force" means the police department, but to

cops it's really two words—The Force, said in capital-letter tones. Like maybe Billy Graham saying "God." Get it? Like we were part of something Holy.

It was a drag going through training, but since I was in pretty good shape already, I did okay. The "street tactics" was what held my attention. While it was supposed to tell you how criminals operated, it also showed you how they got away with it. It was like a father telling his son not to fool around, at the same time he was explaining to him how he could.

That brings me back to fathers, which is really the reason I want someone to know, to really understand. That's the principal trouble with the world—people aren't kind and considerate. They don't understand each other.

Like I told you, some kids get along okay without fathers, but me, it ate at me. Back in Gilmore I'd lock myself in my room and make up stories about my dad and me doing things together. I dropped out of Boy Scouts because the other guys had fathers to take them on camping trips and I didn't. I used to take out my "mad" by pitching my Scout hunting knife into the elm tree in our yard. It helped.

Once the manager of the A & P offered to act as my dad, but he was a fat slob.

"That one-eyed owl with a fat belly!" I yelled at mom. "I'd rather go with Ukaia Merserve."

I should explain that Ukaia was our town weirdo. He was part Indian and part Irish and once his horse bit off three of his fingers. He lived in a tar-roofed shack halfway up Gravelpit Hill. Ukaia was about as nothing as anyone could get in Gilmore. No, sir! Any guy that was going to stand in as my father would have to have some class, like Adolphe Menjou. Yes, sir!

I don't know when I got to hating Adolphe Menjou. I guess I expected him to stop grinning under that thin mustache and talk back to me. But Adolphe Menjou was no better than my old man. Just when I needed him, he flaked out on me. One day I got so mad at Adolphe Menjou I took his picture and ripped it into pieces, went out into the yard, dug a hole, and threw the pieces in it. Then I spit on them.

That night I dreamed I stabbed my father and he let his blood run into a half-gallon cranberry-juice bottle. I woke up with my heart pounding. I felt terrible and hated Adolphe Menjou—no, my father—even worse.

It took me over a year of flipping through billfolds before I finally found another picture of Adolphe Menjou. My mother had gone to a Portland doctor and while I waited around, I found the picture in a store off Congress Street. That night I slept with it under my pillow. I felt so good. It was like having your dad come home after a war. You know, safe and loving you.

From that night I always transferred his picture to any new billfold I bought. After all, I couldn't take a chance of losing my father again!

In a way, joining the police force was like getting a lot of fathers at one time. The older cops were cool to us rookies, like old dogs that wanted to rest in the sun but allowed puppies to wallow over them. They'd growl and yell and cuss us out, but that's all.

My partner was Hank Kettle. Hank was a twenty-year man already, and suffered from stomach trouble. He insisted on doing the driving as we ran our territory, pounding his one fist into his upper stomach like a bell clapper against the bell. Then he'd belch with his mouth open and it would sound like a Marine whoop in an old John Wayne movie. I hated it when we'd stop at some Mexican place and he'd eat tacos with lots of onions. But Kettle was street-wise. He'd seen it all. He filled me in on the fine points of criminal behavior and helped me understand what to expect from the kooks that ran around Los Angeles.

Kettle and me got along okay. Our beat was the Silverlake-Ramparts area. It was a mishmash population—whites, Chicanos, Filipinos, Samoans, and Indians from India. Also, it's a low-income section. That means the shopping is done in lots of cut-rate stores. On one corner of Alvarado, Big Billy's Super-Cut-Rate Emporium sold stuff heaped in bins—shoes tied together by their shoestrings and hung on hooks, deformed bars of soap, and seconds of seconds.

They also sold black shoe polish at two for 29¢. That's what got me stopping off at Big Billy's. I never met Big Billy himself, but one day when I was at the payout counter I looked up as a man came over to the cashier. He was the manager and he was a dead ringer for Adolphe Menjou! It threw me—I mean I felt like I was whammed on the head! Like I finally found my dad. Tongue-tied, I waited for him to recognize me.

I stalled paying for the polish. I couldn't take my eyes off him. My uniform must have spooked him, made him think I was trying to ID him for some crime, because he eased away and avoided my eyes. It made me mad. Hell, he wouldn't even speak to me! Sneaking

off—why shouldn't he feel guilty? Left his kid to grow up without a father! All those times I missed camping because he up and croaked on mom and me. It really burned me up! I threw down some change and jammed out of Adolphe Menjou's crummy store. Kettle was waiting, and I crawled into the black-and-white next to him.

The rest of our shift I was very quiet. I was really upset. I didn't even complain when Kettle beat on his chest like he was King Kong doing his mating call. Even when he burped the spicy Thai food we had for lunch. I told him it would ruin him, but I've found some people never listen.

A couple of days later we were cruising up Alvarado when Kettle slowed up by Big Billy's Super-Cut-Rate Emporium. He double parked.

"Hey, you hear where the early shift found that dude that runs this joint?" Kettle said between beating on his body.

"Didn't know he was lost," I said.

"Yeah, found him in the alley. Throat cut. Funny thing is that he had cash on him. Lots of it."

"That so?" I said. "You better move it, Kettle. We're blocking traffic." I added, "Know who did it?"

"Nope, no leads." Kettle beat a couple rap-a-taps and belched twice.

Two weeks later, at roll call in the squad room, Kettle didn't show. Sick, the C.O. told me.

"Had to see his doc about his stomach." The C.O. ran his finger down a list on his clipboard, then looked over the men before him. He pointed first at me, then at someone behind me.

"You, Pierre Pitkin, team up with Lover."

Everyone ha-ha'd.

Pitkin, that's me. Sickening, isn't it? Pierre Pitkin! Every time I had to fill out papers and sign my name, I hated it all over again. It seemed to grow, the hate, like a pimple-sized irritation into a blister. Parents should realize the importance of naming children. Suppose Napoleon's name was Joe, or Lincoln's had been Gregory? What if it was Tommy Freud, not Sigmund? He might have sold couches instead of putting people on them! Get me? That's why sometimes I wanted to kill Adolphe Menjou—I mean, my dad—hanging me up with a name like Pierre Pitkin.

Lover's reputation with women was as big as his mouth, so no one wanted to be assigned as his partner. Just my luck, I told myself. Lover swaggered over to me. Except that he was fleshier, he was

a dead ringer for Errol Flynn. That's why the squad called him "Lover." His real name was Horace Dyletter.

During the time Kettle was out, Lover made me drive while he sat shotgun. We made a few minor collars, solved a bunch of family disputes, and for three days stood guard over two roped-off streets where NBC was shooting some cops-and-robbers television show. Lover was in his glory trying to pick up chicks. All the time he was getting on my nerves. He couldn't shut up about how great he was. It really got to me after we were back on our regular beat. He kept harping on the second body found in our area.

"Some psycho is doing his thing in *my* territory!" Lover had a way of taking everything personal. "Two guys ripped ear to ear. It's got to be some nut! A real sickie! First it was Big Billy's man and now it's some jewelry salesman from out of town."

"Why does everyone have to be a psycho in your book?" To avoid an old lady crossing, I made a sudden stop so that Lover banged his head on the windshield.

"Why? Why?" He twisted his bedroom eyes toward me while he massaged his forehead. "Because if he wasn't, he'd have taken their cash and jewelry. And he didn't."

"Maybe it's a political thing. Like those Croats being bombed lately or those Iranian students that rioted," I suggested.

"Naw. The Special Investigative Unit's checked into that already. They ain't come up with no connection," Lover said.

"Well, maybe next time," I said. The subject was tiresome.

"What d'ya mean, next time? Hell, you sound like you know there'll *be* a next time!" He leaned forward and square-faced me with that squinty look Errol Flynn gave Rhonda Fleming in that late-night movie I saw just before the one with Adolphe Menjou came on.

I just kept driving and didn't answer him.

"You holding back on some detail? Trying to cop the credit?" He sounded hurt.

"Would I do a thing like that? That's a dumb thing to say. What detail would I have?" I said. "But I think you're wrong about him being a psycho."

"Think away, Frenchy! Just watch out *you* don't get kissed off by the psycho next time around!"

Kettle came back off his sick leave and we returned to our normal routine, except that Kettle didn't stop at Mexican places any more. Now we hit a Chinese joint or a health-food dive. Anyway, Kettle

exchanged tacos and hot peppers for noodles and alfalfa sprouts. His belches were softer and he only whammed on his chest a couple of times a shift.

When another slit throat was found it was all the talk at briefing. The C.O. was giving us hell. He even read us a memo from the Chief.

"This killer has got to be stopped. It isn't like he's slicing up winos. These are quality citizens. Take the last one"—he read from the report—"Calvin Hoffman, minister from Joplin, Missouri in for the Baptist Convention."

"Anyone figure out his M.O. yet?" a cop yelled out.

"That's the hell of it—he hasn't any." The C.O. stopped, pulled on his nose a moment, then almost shamefaced, continued, "Unless—and I know this sounds crazy but—well, they all resemble each other, kinda. Check it out for yourselves. We got photos of all the victims. They all look alike!"

The newspeople latched onto it first. CBS came out with a catch phrase—The Look-Alike Murders. It caught on and the *Los Angeles Times* ran headlines. They printed pictures of the men killed. It was ABC though that first ran the picture of Adolphe Menjou. That really did it. On one TV talk show a reporter interviewed guys who resembled the dead actor. It was weird! Some said they would shave off their mustaches, others planned to change their hairstyles. It got to be a real gas! Another talk show had a makeup artist tip off men how to change their appearance.

After the next victim was found, the Mayor got into the act. He and the Chief held a joint news briefing and told the public that it was only a matter of days before the Look-Alike killer would be apprehended. Homicide had "substantial leads," the Chief stated. You could tell the heat was on from the way the Chief mumbled his words.

Three days later the count went up. That night I went to a movie house that showed old pictures. They played a Sonja Henie one that had Adolphe Menjou in a big part. Watching my dad on the screen made me glad he was dead already. He'd be a natural victim otherwise. My dad sure did resemble the men who were murdered.

Los Angeles became Panicville. The news media went wild. Cronkite even gave it time on his newscast. Finally *The New York Times* dubbed the capers the Menjou Murders and *Time* ran an old picture of the actor on its cover.

Then I had a personal tragedy happen to me. I got a call from Iona

Adamson, our neighbor up in Gilmore, Maine. My mom had a stroke and died before they could get her to the hospital in Portland. Naturally I got leave from the department and went back for her funeral. I took care of selling the house and disposed of furniture and things I had no use for. I let Iona go through her clothes, since that was too painful for me. What was left were odds and ends. One suitcase, the old kind with straps around it and saddle-stitched corner reinforcements, seemed to have my mother's personal stuff. Emotionally, I wasn't ready to dig through it yet, so I decided to take it to Los Angeles with me.

The day I reported back on duty, Kettle told me things had calmed down. It seemed the murders stopped while I was away. At roll call the atmosphere wasn't as tense. In fact, Lover made a joke about maybe they should give me duty in Maine as one way to stop the slashings. I didn't appreciate that and let him know it. We got into a shouting match. Kettle and the C.O. got between us just in time.

Kettle and I had just come out of Lu Chin's Fast Food Drive-In when our radio sputtered out the news. Some big-time Beverly Hills lawyer was found with his throat slit open. Kettle looked at me funny as we listened and it made me mad.

"Don't give me your dead-fish eye," I told him. "Can I help it if another dude is cut up?"

Down at headquarters the big-wigs were sizzling in a pressure cooker of public criticism. It sloshed over to our division at the Ramparts Station. We got citizens calling in phony tips, two psychics gave opposite descriptions of what the knifer looked like, and the Police Department paid a shrink to make a profile of the type of person who might be responsible. I could have told them they were wasting their money. Anyone that smart who avoided leaving any traceable evidence was smart enough to be normal.

Back at our station the Look-Alike Murders became an obsession with us bluejackets. The fact that the last victim was an important man in the community made it worse. I guess when you're rich you don't think of things like that happening to you. Shows you can't discount the way a mind works. Anger is a funny emotion—it doesn't look in pocketbooks.

The tension got to me, and I took off a day's sick leave. By now I'd moved out of my uncle's house and had an apartment of my own located off Ninth Street between Normandy and Western. It was a quiet street and I had one-half of an old stucco duplex. Anyway, it was cheap and did me just fine even if the kitchen was tacky. The

landlady was over 70 and lived on the other side. She said she was so happy to have a policeman as a tenant. Made her feel safe, she said.

I spent the day off watching re-runs of "Lucy," and fixed a washer for the old lady next door. Things were getting to me, little things like Lover always calling me Frenchy, and making little kissy sounds at me during roll call. Actually, I was fed up with his juvenile behavior. With a name like Horace Dyletter, he should have kept his mouth shut. In fact, I seriously considered quitting The Force. Maybe even taking a trip. Getting away from Los Angeles. The money from the sale of mom's house had come in and her small insurance policy had paid off, so I was well fixed for cash.

While I was considering where to go, the mail was dropped through the slot of my door. Besides the usual junk mail, I had a letter from Mr. Hastings, the lawyer in Gilmore who'd handled the house sale. In it he suggested that my mother owned some stock he hadn't located and advised me to look through any of her personal belongings I had. That's when I remembered the suitcase.

Late that evening I dragged it out. Some comic was on TV trying to be funny about the Look-Alike Murders and was making some crack about the killer being Adolphe Menjou coming back from the dead to avenge himself for all those rotten movie parts he had to play. I didn't appreciate the comic getting his kicks by downgrading my dad, so I turned on a re-run of "Starsky and Hutch" instead.

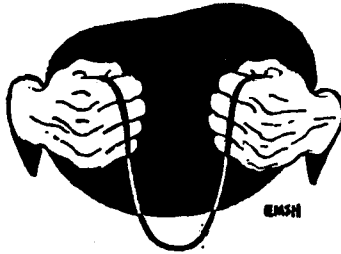
During one of the commercials I opened a brown envelope I'd taken from the suitcase. Some pictures of a man dropped out. Then I got a shock. On the back of each one was written my father's name. I couldn't believe it! I got frantic. I dug some picture albums out of the suitcase. All the photos were pasted in by little black corner squares. I yanked out every one that showed that man's face. Every one had my father's name on the back.

The last album convinced me that the man in all those photographs really was my father. The book showed my baby pictures and in each one that same man was holding a small child. It was me!

I felt sick. I couldn't breathe. My heart pounded as if Kettle was beating on my chest. Finally I calmed down. I had to face it. My mother had lied to me. Made a fool of me, deceived me. Let me go through life thinking I was Adolphe Menjou's son, when I wasn't! My father, the man holding me on his knee, on his shoulder, leading me by the hand, looked just like Errol Flynn! . . .

The whole division turned out for Horace Dyletter's funeral. Motorcycle cops from three counties attended, and Kettle and I were tapped to be two of the pallbearers. I tried to get out of it, but since I'd been one of his partners, I couldn't. The Chief read one of the eulogies and stumbled once and called him "Lover." The Mayor was there, and all the news media. The whole city was spooked because the day after Lover was found with his throat cut in his own garage, another body was discovered.

Funny thing, this one was a dead ringer for Errol Flynn.



DETECTIVERSE

ONLY ONE WAY

by *LOLA SCHANCER*

There once was a fellow named Baxter,
Well known as a punster and gagster,
To get his wife's answer
To "Who's your romancer?"
He knew only one way—he axed 'er!

© 1980 by *Lola Schancer*.

a **NEW** Photographer story by

JAMES HOLDING

The fastidious Photographer, a.k.a. The Nullifier, finds himself in a bind, and even "the tools of his second profession—the steel garrote, the throwing knife, the long hatpin, the small revolver with the fitted silencer"—even these might not provide a solution to his dilemma . . .

HALF A LOAF

by **JAMES HOLDING**

Manuel Andradas was only ten feet away from the parked car when it exploded.

One moment he was strolling idly along the sidewalk with his camera case slung casually over his shoulder; the next, he was blown off his feet by the blast. His head struck the sidewalk with a solid thump, like that of a dropped pumpkin, and in a rain of broken glass and shredded metal, he lost consciousness . . .

When he recovered his senses, he was lying in a narrow bed in a narrow room. A pretty black girl in a spotless white uniform was bending over him. He felt her cool fingers on his wrist, checking his pulse. Regarding her through eyes that seemed unaccountably blurred, he said in a startled voice, "Where am I?"

She didn't answer until she had finished counting his pulse beats. Then, "The Emergency ward of Hospital Dos Estrangêiros," she said.

His thoughts were still tangled. "But I'm no foreigner," he protested. "I live in Rio."

"Hush," she said. "This hospital was the nearest one for you. You have a concussion. You must be quiet." She turned to leave.

"Wait," Manuel said. His eyes went anxiously about the bare

© 1980 by James Holding.

room. "Where is my camera case?"

"In the closet, with your clothes. It's all right. Don't worry."

"Good." Manuel felt relief. Not only because his precious cameras were safe, but also because the tools of his second profession—the steel garrote, the throwing knife, the long hatpin, the small revolver with the fitted silencer—had apparently not been discovered in the false bottom of his case. He said to the nurse, "Do you know what happened to me?"

"Yes. A car was blown up. You were near enough to be caught in the blast. You were lucky to get off with no worse than a few cuts and a mild concussion."

"Was there anyone in the car?"

"A North American, I believe. A business executive. The ambulance brought him here, too. We could do nothing for him." She shook her head.

Another senseless act of protest by the Brazilian terrorists, Manuel thought to himself. The BRA. I was only involved by chance. He put up a hand to his eyes and wiped at them. "My right eye is very painful," he said to the nurse.

She turned back into the room. "Let me see." As she bent over him, he caught a whiff of the faint fragrance she wore. Frangipani, he thought. Very pleasant. She separated the lids of his right eye with her fingers, then clicked her tongue. "I'll get the eye doctor on duty to take a look at it," she told him. "Keep it closed, meanwhile. Don't rub it."

"All right," he agreed. "*Va bem.*" The nurse left.

As he lay there, eyes closed, waiting for the doctor, Manuel thought sourly that he'd have to ask Rodolfo to extend the deadline. The grinding pain in his right eye made him certain that he would be in no condition to carry out a nullification within the specified three days.

He had met Rodolfo the day before in a small coffee-house called A Cascatinha in the Forest of Tijuca. Over their *cafezinhos* they had made the arrangement.

Facing once again Rodolfo's ape-like jaw, thick lips, blotchy skin, rotting teeth and foul breath at close range, Manuel struggled to control his strong aversion to this messenger of the Big Ones. For the assignments relayed to him by Rodolfo meant money. Big money. And money meant more to Manuel than anything else in his life except photography.

Rodolfo said, "Well, Photographer, it's been a long time."

"Too long," said Manuel shortly. "Can we get down to business? Who am I to nullify? And how much do the Big Ones offer?"

"Half a million cruzeiros," said Rodolfo. "Even you cannot cavil at that figure, eh?"

"Very generous indeed," Manuel spoke sarcastically, trying to conceal his satisfaction. "I accept. Who is it?"

Rodolfo wrote a name and address on his paper napkin and passed the napkin across the table to the Photographer.

Agostinho Rodriguez

225 Rua do Rosario

Manuel studied what Rodolfo had written for a few moments, then nodded and tore the paper napkin into tiny fragments. These he placed carefully in his jacket pocket. "Very well," he said. "How soon?"

"Our client is impatient. Within three days?"

"That should be possible."

"Half in advance," Rodolfo said. "As usual. The rest when you present proof."

Manuel rose. He had not even touched his diminutive cup of black coffee. Rodolfo rose with him. When they shook hands at parting, Rodolfo left a thick pad of banknotes in Manuel's palm.

The pain in the Photographer's eye became excruciating by the time the nurse returned. He bore it with stoicism. The nurse wheeled his bed, with Manuel in it, into another room—an examination or operating room, he surmised—and ten minutes later the promised doctor was examining his eye under an operating microscope.

The doctor was a slender, almost effeminate man somewhere in his early thirties, who bore himself with an easy dignity that bespoke not only professional competence but generations of good breeding. His hair, slightly wavy, was worn long enough to cover his ears in the modern fashion; his hands were long-fingered and sensitive; his dark eyes, set in deep wide-spaced sockets, regarded the Photographer with a gaze both clear and candid when he straightened up from the microscope's eyepiece.

"There are two shards of glass imbedded in your eye, Senhor," he informed Manuel in a pleasant voice. "One on the cornea which is causing most of your pain, I think, since the cornea is so very sensitive, you understand. The second splinter has gone deeper. It is lodged between the lens and retina."

Quick alarm tightened the Photographer's jaw. Perfect eyesight

was essential to both of his professions. He drew a deep controlled breath. "Will my eyesight be affected, Doctor?"

The doctor patted his shoulder reassuringly. "We'll get the glass fragments out right now, Senhor, and in a week or two you'll never know you had them."

"Ah," said Manuel, relieved. "You'll remove the glass now?"

"Shouldn't take more than a half hour," the doctor said.

He was as good as his word. Within half an hour the doctor had anesthetized the eye, teased the glass shard from the abraded cornea, withdrawn the second, more deeply lodged splinter with delicate forceps through a tiny incision, and stitched up the incision with almost invisible sutures.

"Any pain?" he asked Manuel at the end.

"None," Manuel replied. "You are a miracle worker, *pedrao*."

"Hardly that," said the doctor, smiling. "Only a *medico*. An ophthalmic surgeon."

"And you think my eye will be as good as ever?"

"I guarantee it, barring infection. You must come to me in five days to have the stitches taken out."

"Here to the hospital?"

"No, no." The doctor shook his head. "I am only here as the eye doctor on duty in Emergency today. Come to my office to have your stitches out. 225 Rua do Rosario."

"225 Rua do Rosario." Manuel repeated the address dutifully, trying to conceal the agitation roused in him by the doctor's words. "In five days. I'll remember." After a hesitation he said, "Will they allow me to leave the hospital now?"

"I'll check. I don't see why not, though. Your concussion is minor."

"*Muito obrigado*," said Manuel with more emotion than he was accustomed to display. "Many, many thanks, sir. I appreciate what you've done. My eyesight is very precious to me."

"It is to everybody." The doctor grinned at him. "But you're very welcome."

The Photographer asked the question he knew must be asked. "May I know who has saved the sight of my eye, Doctor? *Come se chama?*"

"Rodriguez," said the doctor. "Dr. Agostinho Rodriguez." He dropped atropine in Manuel's wounded eye to soothe the irritation, applied a pad and bandage. "I'll see you in five days, Senhor."

In view of Manuel's accident Rodolfo agreed readily enough to

extend the deadline on Dr. Rodriguez's assassination. But the ensuing five days were nevertheless days of mental turmoil for the Photographer.

He was, by any measurement, a cold, emotionless, cruel, and often brutal man who could, without a qualm, commit deliberate murder for money. Yet lurking, too, somewhere in the depths of his murky nature, were the sensitive perceptions and the quick emotions of the true artist.

This dichotomy explained, perhaps, his preference for the term "nullification" to the bald, unequivocal word "murder" when referring to his second profession. Perhaps it also served to explain, if somewhat obscurely, why he now found his native cupidity at serious odds with a feeling of gratitude toward Dr. Rodriguez. And why it was that he could harbor, on the one hand, a strong reluctance to nullify the man who had saved his eyesight, and on the other, an almost equally strong desire for the money he could earn by doing so.

Ponder the matter as he would, Manuel could think of no way out of this dilemma, no way to reconcile his conflicting emotions.

Still undecided, he went on the fifth day as instructed to the office of Dr. Rodriguez and had the stitches removed from his eye.

And on the day after that he asked Rodolfo to meet him at four in the afternoon at a secluded bench in the Jardim Botanico.

When they had exchanged greetings. Manuel said to Rodolfo, "It is done, Rodolfo. I am sorry for the delay. But it is done."

Rodolfo raised his eyebrows. "So soon? Good. When did you do it?"

"Last night."

"You have the proof?"

"Of course. Have I ever failed to have it?" He passed a Polaroid print to Rodolfo, who examined it with interest.

"You killed him in a parking lot?" Rodolfo asked.

"Yes. For appearance's sake. As though he had been going to retrieve his car when he had his seizure, do you see?"

"His seizure?"

"Do you see any marks of violence on him?" Manuel spoke with the pride of a craftsman in his work. "He died of a brain hemorrhage, poor fellow."

"That's a new one," Rodolfo said. "You can produce a brain hemorrhage at will, Photographer?"

"It is quite simple. I insert a six-inch hatpin through the extreme inner corner of his eye into his brain. When withdrawn, the hatpin

leaves no evidence that even an autopsy might discover."

Rodolfo licked his lips. "Clever," he said.

"And also, I thought, appropriate," said Manuel softly. "Did you know he was an eye doctor, Rodolfo?"

"No, I did not." Rodolfo stood up and stretched. A light breeze rustled the leaves of the banyan tree above their heads. "If our client accepts this proof"—he waved the Polaroid photograph of the dead Dr. Rodriguez—"I'll meet you here tomorrow at the same time with the rest of the money."

Manuel nodded. Rodolfo tucked the photograph into a pocket and walked away, his arms swinging like an ape's.

When Manuel approached the bench in the Jardim Botânico the next afternoon, he saw that Rodolfo had arrived before him. He sat on the bench waiting. A subdued excitement, an almost tangible impatience, edged his first words.

"At last you arrive," he said. "I have been waiting for you."

Manuel said, "Did I make a mistake in the time of our appointment?"

Rodolfo's lips lifted in a contemptuous smile. "No," he said, "but you certainly made a mistake when you killed Dr. Rodriguez! A big fat mistake, Photographer!"

Manuel sat down on the bench slowly. "A mistake? You are joking, Rodolfo. I never make mistakes. Have you brought the rest of my money?"

"No, I have not."

"My proof was not adequate?"

"In its own way, quite adequate." Rodolfo took malicious pleasure in baiting Manuel.

"Well, then?"

"It was adequate proof that you had killed the wrong man," Rodolfo said.

"What!" Manuel half rose in protest. "What nonsense is this? The man in my photograph was Dr. Rodriguez! I am as certain of that as you are of damnation!" He permitted anger to make his voice go shrill.

Rodolfo laughed aloud.

"The great perfectionist!" he taunted. "The infallible nullification expert! You killed Dr. Rodriguez, yes. But the wrong one. Dr. Paulo Rodriguez got your hatpin in his eye instead of Dr. Agostinho Rodriguez, his nephew."

Manuel's jaw dropped. The anger was replaced by chagrin in his muddy brown eyes. "Do you mean," he asked in a chastened voice, "that there were *two* doctors named Rodriguez at that address?"

"Exactly," said Rodolfo. "And unfortunately you killed the wrong one. They were colleagues, you fool. Uncle and nephew. Both named Rodriguez. Both eye doctors. Working together with joint offices in the same building. Now are you beginning to understand the enormity of your error?"

Manuel spread his hands in a gesture of acute embarrassment. "Nonetheless, Rodolfo," he said earnestly, "it was my *first* error, please remember that. And a very natural one, under the circumstances, don't you agree? So permit me to rectify it by nullifying the *proper* Dr. Rodriguez, eh?" Manuel looked sharply at Rodolfo, then went on, "After all, the Big Ones are partly responsible for my mistake. They did not tell *you* there were *two* Rodriguez's, did they?"

"No."

"So you could not tell me. The information would have prevented my error."

Rodolfo said, his thick lips twisting in their oily smile, "You still do not know the worst, Photographer."

"What could be worse than this?"

Rodolfo hesitated for a long moment to build the dramatic impact of his next words. "The man you killed by mistake was our *client*, Photographer! Our client, do you understand that? The very man who paid the Big Ones to have his nephew killed!"

Manuel swore aloud, something he did infrequently. "Your client!" he then said bleakly. He had suspected as much yesterday, when on his arrival at Dr. Rodriguez's office, he had been referred to the uncle for removal of his stitches because the nephew was absent, engaged in emergency surgery at the hospital. From the uncle's comments about his brilliant young partner, Manuel had deduced that the older man was secretly envious of his nephew's greater talents and would have welcomed an end to their unequal partnership—indeed, might even have contrived one. Feigning anxiety, Manuel said to Rodolfo, "Do I get another chance?"

"No. Why bother killing the nephew now? The Big Ones have already been paid. And our client is in no condition to complain of your sloppy service."

"Ah," said Manuel, "then I'll receive the rest of my fee?"

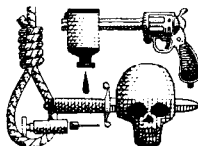
"No. You forfeit it by your stupid mistake. My best advice to you is to forget it, Photographer. And be grateful that we have decided

to let you keep the advance we gave you."

The Photographer sulked in glum silence for a moment. Then he said harshly, "Nevertheless, you will pay my expenses, will you not? You owe me that, at least."

"Expenses!" Rodolfo scoffed. "Expenses! What expenses?" He rolled his eyes heavenward to indicate the extent of his merriment at such a ridiculous request. The western sky was flushed with the first faint gold of approaching sunset.

Manuel touched his injured eye with a forefinger. "Do you have any idea, Rodolfo," he asked, "what a simple visit to an eye doctor costs today?"



DETECTIVER SE

HIS OWN EXECUTIONER

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

The justice stepped upon a chair,
His soul was filled with grief, despair.
Around his neck he looped a rope,
For he had given up all hope.
He gave the chair a little nudge
And thus became a hanging judge.

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a Haila and Jeff Troy **SHORT NOVEL** by

KELLEY ROOS

complete in this issue

At the time of this writing there are only two steamboats plying Ol' Man River, the lazy rollin' waters of the Mississippi—the *Delta Queen* and the *Mississippi Queen*, both luxurious, authentic paddlewheelers, with “wedding-cake superstructures” and gingerbread scrollwork, both re-creating in 3-, 4-, 7-, and 14-night cruises (“extravaganzas”) the Golden Age of American river travel. Remember that fabulous musical-comedy-operetta, *Show Boat?*—novel by Edna Ferber, music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, originally produced for Broadway by Florenz Ziegfeld. Remember the great stars in the first cast?—Edna May Oliver, Charles Winninger, Helen Morgan, Jules Bledsoe. In the earliest revival?—Paul Robeson, Dennis King. In the 1951 M-G-M movie version?—Kathryn Grayson, Ava Gardner, Howard Keel, Joe E. Brown, Agnes Moorehead, William Warfield.

Well, here's your chance to visit a genuine Mississippi stern-wheeler. Cross the gangplank, hear the blast of the steamboat whistle, and join amateur detectives, Haila and Jeff Troy, in an exciting murder mystery aboard *The New Sensation* . . .

Kelley Roos is the pen name of Audrey Kelley and William Roos, partners in marriage and in writing detective stories. You will be interested to learn that before they got married, during their brief theatrical career, Audrey and Bill performed on the good ship *Golden Rod*, a showboat anchored at the foot of Stanwyck Street, Pittsburgh . . .

“Q”

DEATH IS A TROUPER

by **KELLEY ROOS**

I stood high on the bank of the Allegheny River and looked down at the showboat. I had spent nine hours rushing here, hardly able to wait for this moment. And there it was, there it lay in the water of the Allegheny, a real, honest-to-goodness showboat. I stood staring at it and wondering when the next train left Pittsburgh for New York. I couldn't force myself to move one inch closer.

Turning, I took a step back toward New York. Just one step, that was all. I had thought of Jeff Troy. Troy was sitting in our apartment, smugly waiting for me to come back, to fall on my knees before him, to tearfully beg his forgiveness. That wouldn't happen in a million years, two million. Not because of my stubbornness nor any false pride on my part. It wouldn't happen, simply because I was in the right. It had all been Jeff's fault.

How it had started I wasn't sure, but suddenly we were standing in our bedroom, he shouting harsh, ignorant insults at me, I screaming calmly back in self-defense. He had deserved what happened then; it was the only thing a lady could do. I slapped him. Mainly, of course, to bring him to his senses. It didn't. He hit me back. He struck me. I spent the rest of the night with the happily married couple in the apartment above.

By dawn I had realized that this was the end. It wasn't just this quarrel; that might have happened to any man and wife. It went deeper than that. We simply weren't suited to each other. Oh, we had had five years of happiness together. But it was a shallow, surface happiness. Perhaps it hadn't been happiness at all, merely excitement. Jeff, instead of settling down and becoming the fine photographer he could have been, had insisted on chasing about solving murders. He refused to realize that a marriage must be founded on peace and serenity, on understanding, on those things a woman needs. By dawn I had made my decision.

First, I must get a job, become self-sustaining.

As I started out to find that job I stopped at our apartment door.

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I could smell coffee over-perking and eggs burning. I could hear Jeff singing a medley of Dartmouth songs at the top of his peculiarly raucous voice.

It was his singing that made me take the first job offered me, made me glad that the job was out of town. It would be a cleaner break that way. There would be no chance of our meeting in restaurants, at cocktail parties, anywhere. And, besides, the job was on a showboat.

A showboat! A brave pioneer that had taken the theater to the frontiers of young America. A queen robed in circus colors sweeping majestically upstream between banks of cheering men, women, and children. Historical, romantic, and enchanting. Magnolia blossoms and moonlight on deep, winding rivers. That was for me . . .

I turned now, and again looked down across the car-jammed parking lot at my showboat squatting drearily in the city-stricken water of the Allegheny. The long, narrow building atop its barge looked like a dowdy, tired barn. A thin, one-coat paint job accentuated rather than covered its shabbiness. There was only one bright spot: a painted-on advertisement for chewing tobacco. The whole effect was not enchanting.

But I tightened my hold on my two bags and started through the parking lot toward the boat. I couldn't let down the agent who had got me the job. And I would show Jeff Troy; yes, I would. I walked faster.

On the boat's flat roof I could see a man tinkering with a calliope, probably coaxing it into shape for tonight's musical plea for an audience. A woman with blond hair, as dazzling and artificial as a sun lamp, leaned against the rail at the downstream end of the lower deck. A little girl skipped along the narrow balcony lined with staterooms that formed the second deck of the boat.

As I came closer I could see that a desperate attempt to rejuvenate the ancient river theater had been made. Across the not quite painted-out name *Sensation* were the words: *The New Sensation*. The psychological effect of the rechristening was, to say the most, puny.

I went up the gangplank. Ahead of me were large double doors. On one side, a one-sheet advertised this week's show: *No Mother to Guide Her*. On the other half, a second one-sheet announced that next week Captain L. L. Taggart would proudly present *Tildy Ann*. To the left of the door was a grilled box office, now closed; to the

right, an office. Through its wall of a window I could see a man sitting at a roll-top desk, a pleasant-looking man with silver-gray hair that made his young face seem younger.

I rapped on the window, and he started smiling before his eyes found me. He rose and opened the door.

"Captain Taggart?" I asked.

"Wrong," he said. "I'm Whitney Mallon. The director."

"I'm Haila . . ." I had almost said "Troy." I said, "I'm Haila Rogers."

"Oh, yes. We've been expecting you." He smiled at me. "I can tell you're a good actress."

I smiled back. "I can tell you're a good director."

"Well! We're going to get along fine, aren't we?"

"We're off to a good start."

"I'll introduce you to the captain," Whitney said. "He's up on the roof."

L. L. Taggart didn't in the least live up to my dream of a showboat captain. He wasn't roly-poly and jolly, his eyes didn't twinkle mischievously, his hair wasn't a thatch of white. Captain Taggart was lean and dour and bald; he looked like an unhappy eagle. He didn't turn away from his work on the calliope until Whitney spoke to him. Then he grunted and inspected me.

"Ever play a boat before, Miss Rogers?"

"No, sir."

Whitney said, "She's played lots in New York."

"New York ain't the river," the Captain said, and it was obvious that that was to the river's credit.

I tried to smile at the Captain, but it bounced back into my face. I kept trying. I said gaily, "When do we sail, Captain?"

"Sail?"

"Well, yes . . . sail. Steam—cast off—float down the river."

"We don't," the Captain said. "We stay right here in Pittsburgh all summer." He turned to Whitney: "Miss Rogers can have Room Six." He turned back to me: "Suppose you know your pay's twenty dollars a week and room and board. Breakfast at nine, dinner at one, supper at six. If you're late for meals you ain't an experienced actress."

He went back to his work, and Whitney, chuckling, led me away. As he helped me move my bags from the office to my room, he told me about the Captain. The book of his law was brief and pointed.

No folderol like parsley on potatoes, no drinking, no gambling, no entertaining members of the opposite sex in your room. Women who smoked were heathens; and "Don't pester me for a raise because you're all making more money than me." The Captain was admired and respected by his troupe, but hardly loved by it. He was an honest man, not a charming one.

Whitney left me at the door of my stateroom. I would want to unpack, he said. I sat down on the bed, looked at the four closely associated walls, the bare floor, the one straight chair, the tiny washbasin in a corner.

I wasn't so sure that I did want to unpack.

I wasn't fussy; I could stand this room. And I could get over my initial disappointment in the boat itself. But the Captain's information that *The New Sensation* was to be moored, stationary as a barn all summer, was the crowning blow. It might as well not have been a boat at all. It was to stay in Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh was a great, exciting city. There were the fabulous steel mills here; the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers met here to form the beautiful, blue Ohio; there was Fort Pitt, which George Washington had built to sleep in, safe from Indians and such. I had heard wonderful things about Pittsburgh, but I had never heard it even remotely mentioned as a summer resort.

I pushed open the frosted-glass window and looked out. A freight train clanked along an elevated track above the far edge of the parking lot. The railroad was not fifty yards from the bedroom window. The engineer waved at me and I waved back. At least, the natives were friendly.

The little girl I had seen on my way down to the boat came skipping along the deck and turned into my room. Her hair was now up in dozens of curlers. Her plump face was thick with cold cream. In her hands was a dripping ball of cloth. This she rubbed methodically back and forth under her chin.

"I'm Rita Pinker," she said. "And you?"

"I'm Haila Rogers."

"Welcome to our midst. Such as it is."

"Thank you. What's wrong with your face?"

"It felt tired and undernourished," Rita said, "so I'm giving it an ice rub. I guess that's enough." She unfolded the cloth and sucked at the ice.

"Are you an actress, Rita?"

"Certainly."

"Are your parents on the boat?"

Rita nodded. "Mother's the character woman, and my father plays small parts and he's the candy butcher. You know, sells it between the acts. He's the best on the river. I wish he'd get false teeth. But he absolutely refuses to."

"I beg your pardon, Rita?"

"Years ago he got all his front teeth knocked out defending mother's honor. They were playing on *The Silver Queen* in Louisville, and a fireman sent my mother a half-dozen roses. Do you want to hear all about it?"

I didn't answer Rita. Outside on deck a voice had called to someone, a voice I knew. Greta Cole was on this boat. It had been five years since we had played a season of summer stock together, five years since I had seen her. That didn't matter. At this dismal moment there was no one in all the world that I would rather see than Greta. I rushed out on deck.

A woman was standing at the door next to mine. It was only her soft blond hair that made me recognize her. Nothing else about this tired, grim-faced woman was even vaguely reminiscent of the Greta Cole I had known.

The bright vigor that had been a part of her was gone; her whole body seemed to sag with weariness. The mouth that had bounced jauntily upward at the corners was drawn in a sullen line. There were other lines, too, at her eyes and on her forehead. Greta Cole couldn't have been more than thirty-five, yet she was an old and tired woman.

She saw me then and came to me, her arms outstretched and her face glowing suddenly.

"Haila!" She was laughing and talking together while she hugged me, and she didn't notice that I was limp with bewilderment at the change five years had made in her. "Haila, it's really you!"

"Yes, Greta!"

"I don't believe it! Nothing this nice could happen."

"It's true," I said. "I work here."

We were in my room now, sitting on the bed. Rita sat between us, her eyes moving from one to the other as we gabbed like a pair of lunatic roommates at their twentieth class reunion.

"Darling," Greta said, "and how is Jeff?"

"Quite well, I imagine."

"You imagine?"

"Yes," I said. "I've left Jeff."

"No! No, Haila, you couldn't! No girl could ever leave Jeff Troy. Especially not you! After the way you ran after him!"

"If you remember correctly, Greta, it was not I who did the running."

"Haila, that summer! I've never seen anyone so crazy over a boy."

"I was young and impressionable," I admitted. "I realize now that I never loved the big ape."

Greta laughed at me, long and loud. She stopped as a bell clanged angrily somewhere on board. "That's supper, Haila. We'll talk about Jeff later." She took me with one hand, Rita with the other. "Come along, kids."

The dining-room stretched across the upriver end of the second deck and it was a Spartan spot. Four whitewashed walls, eight chairs, one long, unpainted table. That was all. The Captain evidently considered interior decoration a shameful affectation.

That worthy was already in his place at the head of the table, and a leading man, if I ever saw one, was just pulling out his chair. His mass of shining black hair, his blue eyes, his straight nose and square chin all spelled Matinee Idol. But there was a suggestion of seediness about him; his day had been yesterday or the day before. He oozed personality, but there was nothing behind it. I liked him immediately, and felt like a bobby-socker because I did.

Rita rushed in with an introduction.

"Miss Haila Rogers," she said, "I would like you to meet Mr. Russell Hogan."

Mr. Russell Hogan greeted me elaborately. His voice was high and thin, almost tinny.

Behind her napkin Rita whispered to me, "Isn't Russell dreamy?" Her deep sigh blew the napkin almost horizontal. "I'm secretly in love with him. I'd marry him, except he's a lousy actor. He stinks, but he's simply divine."

Hogan knew that whatever Rita was saying concerned him, and he winked at me.

Then Rita took the responsibility for me over entirely; she loved to introduce. She introduced me to a wiry, elderly woman whose name was Hilda and who served us the soup she had brewed. I met Whitney Mallon, an introduction Rita need not have made, but Whitney and I co-operated. I met my sponsor's parents, Joe and Ella Pinker. I met Miss Trudi Lang, the lady with the flaming hair. Then

Rita introduced me to Hilda again, and called it a day. She ate soup.

"Polly!" Ella Pinker said.

There was no answer.

"Polly!" Ella said again. "Polly, elbows off the table!"

"Mother, please! I am now officially Rita Pinker."

Ella said, "Lana, Hedy, Jennifer! And now it's Rita. What next?"

"Rita is official. But I'm thinking of changing Pinker."

Her father snorted. "Over my dead body you'll change Pinker!" When he spoke he kept his upper lip stiff to hide his dental catastrophe and it made his ruddy face a clown's, expressionless yet comic. "That's the name God give me and I give you and you keep!"

"I'm changing it to Rita Dubarry, even if I have to marry a Dubarry. Mother, why didn't you marry a Dubarry?"

Ella had trouble keeping her round, good-natured face severe. "Eat your supper, Polly."

"Call me Rita and I will."

"Please eat, Mrs. Rita Dubarry," Joe said. "Please do, or I'll pinch off your head."

My attention was swept away from the Pinker family to the far end of the table. The Captain and Russell Hogan were shouting belligerently into each other's face. It seemed that the Captain thought Hogan knew less about river show business than that boiled potato there, and Hogan thought it high time the Captain realized that showboats and their corny melodrama were finished. Trudi Lang stepped in and broke up the battle.

"Now, now," she said, "we are all one big, happy family here, big and happy, yes." Her weird accent, an accent without an identity, made the simple statement a joke, and everyone but the Captain and Hogan laughed, Trudi's own laughter ringing loudest. "Business is good, and it will get better."

"It could be sensational," Hogan said, "if we did some good plays!"

"No, no, stop it!" Trudi said. "Why do you insist, Russell, on being a pest to the Captain? In a month almost now we will be in New York and . . ."

"What's that?" the Captain asked quickly.

Russell Hogan made a warning gesture. "Trudi!" he said.

"What difference, darling? Might as well tell the Captain now." She stood up as if to make a speech. "And I will."

She lifted her chin high, arched her lips in a brilliant crimson smile.

She was flamboyant and lusty and as theatrical as a musical-comedy finale.

"Yes!" she said. "Russell and I, we are going to New York. We are going to produce a play on Broadway starring Trudi Lang and Russell Hogan! Is that not nice?"

"Nice?" Greta said. "Trudi, it's wonderful!"

The Pinker family thought it was terrific and cheered Trudi's announcement. The Captain grumbled his annoyance at having his company broken up, and his director seconded him.

"We need you and Russell," Whitney said, frowning. Then he smiled and extended his hand to Trudi. "Congratulations, darling. You'll kill them in New York."

"You are so sweet, Whitney. And if I kill anyone in New York, I will owe it all to you. Yes, but for you I would still be with circuses and carnivals. I would not be a legitimate actress at all. Whitney, I thank you."

"Trudi," Whitney grinned back, "you are welcome."

Joe Pinker said, "Hey! It takes dough to produce a show. Did your or Hogan's wealthy uncle pass away unexpected?"

Trudi laughed. "Money! There is lots of that! And I shall have even some more when Mr. Mallon pays me back what he owes me." She clapped Whitney playfully on the shoulder, playfully but so heartily that he winced. Trudi grinned at his discomfort. "I shall be waiting for you next payday, my dear! Yes, I shall, and perhaps with a policeman."

"Please do," Whitney said.

"If you didn't waste so much money," the Captain said to Whitney, "you wouldn't need to borrow against your salary."

"Hey, Whitney!" Joe Pinker said. "Maybe Trudi ain't kiddin' about the cop. I seen her comin' out of the courthouse the other day. How about it, Trudi?"

Trudi winked at Joe. "You are a spy, you! I was in the courthouse, yes, but about a license for a dog."

"A dog!" Polly cried. "Are you getting a dog, Trudi?"

"Maybe I might." She looked at Whitney and said, "Lately I have been thinking a lot about a dog." Then she laughed and pushed Whitney's hair down over his eyes. "One more item now and then I shall be seated. I wish to announce the engagement to be married of Mr. Russell Hogan and Miss Trudi Lang, me!"

"Oh, no!" little Polly Pinker screamed.

She leaped to her feet and rushed dramatically from the dining-

room. Everyone laughed but Ella. Shaking her head helplessly, she watched the child go. A toast in lukewarm coffee was drunk to Trudi and Russell, and, in a few minutes, the company adjourned to make ready for the evening's performance, the Captain to build up steam in his calliope.

When, an hour later, the music began to roll out, I could hardly believe my ears. The tune was *Dixie*, but it was barely recognizable, so badly mangled that it was comic. It was Joe Pinker who gave me the low-down on that situation. Our Captain was completely tone deaf, unable to tell one note from another. Nevertheless, he considered himself the Paderewski of the big rivers, and any arguments to the contrary were fighting words . . .

It was two hours later that I sat in Greta's dressing-room, talking to her as she got out of costume and make-up. It was like old times and it was good. Backstage was a medley of voices and footsteps and slamming doors. In the next room someone was enthusiastically and skillfully whistling a fancy rendition of *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. I was aghast.

"Who," I asked, "is whistling in his dressing-room?"

"That's Russell," Greta said.

"Isn't he superstitious?"

"Yes, but that's his lucky song. He says it cancels out the bad luck of whistling in his dressing-room. You must ask Russell to give you his lecture on whistling some time. It seems there are two schools: pouted or pursed lips and whistling through his teeth. Russell is of the latter school, and he'll tell you why. His lecture is really very funny. The first two or three times . . . How did you like the show, Haila?"

"Fine." I had enjoyed every moment of it, from Ella's galloping overture on a tinny piano to the roaring climax of the crusty old melodrama itself. "Greta," I said, "I'm going to like being on *The New Sensation*."

"Oh, did you think you mightn't?"

"When I first saw it, yes. But now, with you here, Greta, and I've met the others . . ."

"Darling, it's going to be wonderful! We'll have a swell time." She snapped out the lights in her dressing-room. We walked together along the second deck and Greta slipped her arm through mine. "Haila, I've got a bottle of sherry. We'll break it open and celebrate!"

"I'd like that."

"And we'll talk all night! I want to know everything, all about you and Jeff."

She pushed wide the door to her stateroom. Then, like lightning, her hand darted out, snatched at the knob, and slammed shut the door. Over her shoulder I had seen nothing but a row of dresses that hung along one wall. "Greta," I said, "what is it?"

"Nothing." She turned, and in that brief moment she had become the woman I had seen on the deck that afternoon, old and tired and grim. When she spoke, her voice was cold and harsh: "Good night, Haila. I'll see you in the morning."

The door opened only wide enough for her to slip through, and then it closed in my face. After a minute I went into my own room.

I sat on the edge of my bed and thought about Greta, wondered what to think about Greta. I didn't know. She had been gay all evening. We had chattered together like a pair of long-lost magpies.

I realized then that there was one thing we had not talked about. We had talked about me, about the boat, about many things. Never about Greta and her past five years. Something had happened to Greta; it was still happening to her. It was something so dreadful that Greta could not speak of it, not even to me . . .

It was not the morning sun that awakened me. My watch needed its radium dial to tell me it was nearly nine. I got out of bed and pulled the frosted-glass window up.

I could see the gangplank and a few yards up the riverbank, no more. All night the steel mills had sent up their smoke, and it had collaborated with the foggy air to concoct one of Pittsburgh's notorious smogs.

Then, as I watched, Greta Cole suddenly emerged from the ugly gray haze and came slowly down the slope to the gangplank. She was walking with a dragging step, her arms hanging listlessly at her sides.

As I dressed I listened to the boat come alive, with the sound of running water, the distant clatter of kitchen noises, Polly Pinker stridently rehearsing a part to herself, Russell Hogan shrilly whistling his favorite tune through his teeth. The breakfast bell clanged, and I heard Hilda give Russell her special attention. There was a sharp rapping at a windowpane and then Hilda's voice called out, "Mr. Hogan! You awake to stay, Mr. Hogan?"

The whistling from the cabin rose in an assentive crescendo, and I heard Hilda patter back to the kitchen.

When I reached the dining-room, only Ella Pinker and Polly were at the table. They were listening to old Hilda's morning malediction.

"I got something to do all day," Hilda was saying, "besides make breakfast. I got two other meals to get ready. I can't wait all morning for good-for-nothing actors!"

"I'm sorry, Hilda," I said.

"Actors! You'd think they was dressin' for the opera, not breakfast. His Royal Highness Mr. Hogan! When I called him fifteen minutes ago he was shavin' already, and he still ain't here! Well, if Mr. Hogan wants fresh coffee he can whistle up a hollow stump!"

Polly scrambled to her feet. "I'll get him!"

"You stay here!" Ella said, but the child was out of sight. Ella sighed.

"That kid! It used to be she got crushes on juveniles. Now it's leading men. Next it'll be Captain Taggart, himself."

"Well," Hilda said, "at least he ain't no actor."

Ella laughed. "Hilda, you ever seen an actor you liked?"

"No! And I been lookin' for seventy-three years."

"I heard," Ella said slyly, "you once married an actor."

"It's a lie! It's a lie some ornery heathen made up that don't want me to get into heaven!"

Polly Pinker stumbled into the dining-room. Her face was white with shock. Ella spun around, and Polly threw herself into her mother's arms.

"Russell," she whispered. "It's Russell."

I ran along the deck past the staterooms until I came to the one that was Hogan's. Its door was standing ajar. I slipped through the opening into the room.

The actor sat sprawled on the floor, his legs straight in front of him, his back against the bed. One side of his face was smooth and clean, the other covered with white lather.

I dropped on my knees beside him and slid my hand along his wrist. The pressure was just enough to start his body toppling toward me. I caught him by the arms and then I saw the clean incision that a knife had made just below his left shoulder . . .

Even through the closed door of the phone booth I could hear the newsboy shout his headline that an actor had been murdered. I put my free hand over my free ear and waited. It seemed hours before Jeff answered in New York.

"Jeff," I said, "it's Hilda."

"Hello, Haila. Listen, do we only have three frying pans? I'm having some folks in for dinner tonight and . . ."

"Jeff, do you remember Greta Cole?"

"Sure," he said. His voice sharpened. "What's happened? What's the matter?"

"Greta's been arrested for murder. Jeff, a plane leaves La Guardia Field for Pittsburgh in an hour. Could you make it?"

"Yes."

"I'll meet you in the lobby of the Abbott Hotel. The airline limousine will take you there."

"All right."

"Hurry, Jeff."

"Goodbye."

He hung up before I could say goodbye. He was on his way, and I felt better. I had done something toward helping Greta Cole.

It had been a long and grueling morning. Immediately upon their invasion of the boat, the police had confined each of us to his own cabin. They had gone their rounds, asked their questions, made their notes. They had visited Greta twice. The second time they had taken her away. The rest of us were free now to do as we pleased. The case, in the opinion of the police, seemed to have been solved.

It was nearly two o'clock now; it would be some time before Jeff arrived. I walked the foggy streets of Pittsburgh; in desperation I went into two movies and stayed fifteen minutes in each. Finally I made my way to the Abbott and waited there . . .

Jeff came up the stairs into the lobby. He looked fine, somehow more attractive than I remembered him. Then I noticed that he was not alone. He was very much with a tall, willowy brunette. He said something to her, and she laughed heartily, her eyelashes flapping at him. Her big paw on his arm, she leaned toward him and murmured in his ear; then she swayed after the bellhop who was carrying her luggage to the desk. When Jeff located me I was engrossed in a newspaper. "Hello, Haila," he said.

I put down the paper. "Well! You got here, didn't you?"

"That girl I was talking to . . ."

"Oh, were you talking to a girl?"

"I met her on the plane."

"Really?" I said. "Did you lock up our apartment good?"

"My apartment, Haila. You left my bed and board."

"Jeff," I said, "why won't you be sensible and apologize? Why won't you admit you're wrong?"

"I was right, Haila. I looked it up. Grover Cleveland served two terms."

"One term!"

"Two!"

"Don't you shout at me, Jeff Troy."

"Look, you'd better tell me about Greta Cole."

I told him everything. I started with the first moment I had seen Greta, and ended with my last glimpse of her as she sat in a car between two policemen. I told him little things about the boat and its crew that couldn't possibly be important. But that was how he wanted to hear it.

"This is going to be tough," Jeff said. "Let's get going."

Detective Lambert of the Pittsburgh homicide squad was not pleased to see us. He stood toweringly tall behind his desk and looked down his nose at us.

"I used to visit Pittsburgh when I was a kid," Jeff said. "I had an aunt here. She used to take me riding up the Mount Washington incline. You know, that railroad up that cliff."

"Never been on it," Lambert said.

"I'll take you," Jeff said. "As my guest."

"No, thanks."

"We'll pack a lunch."

I sent Jeff a warning glance, and he ignored it. There was nothing he liked better than a policeman who didn't like him. But I breathed a great sigh of relief when he got down to business. "That was quick work," he said. "You sure nabbed Greta Cole in a hurry."

Lambert smiled tartly. "You think it was too quick, huh?"

"A bit hasty, maybe."

"Miss Cole," Lambert said, "left the boat after the play last night. She walked the streets until morning. She went back to the boat. Ten minutes later Hogan was murdered."

"You've boiled it down to a very fine point."

"The cook testified that Hogan was shaving at five minutes to nine. He was stabbed before he had half finished. It doesn't take a man longer than ten minutes to shave."

"All right," Jeff said. "Greta was there and she had the opportunity to stab him. So did everybody else on board."

"But nobody else," Lambert said slowly, "had a motive."

I said, "But Greta didn't have a motive!"

"She didn't, Mrs. Troy?"

"She—she couldn't have! What motive?"

Lambert sat down and smiled at us. "Russell Hogan was going to marry Trudi Lang. They were going to New York together, to produce a play there. They announced it last night at dinner."

"Yes," Jeff said.

"And Greta Cole," Lambert went on, "didn't like that."

"She didn't care," I said. "Hogan didn't mean anything to her."

"A little something, Mrs. Troy. At one time Hogan and Greta Cole were married."

"Married!" I said. "Greta—!"

"That surprises you, doesn't it, Mrs. Troy? They were married about four years ago. And a year later Hogan left her. Flat. There was a divorce. So Hogan didn't mean a thing to Greta Cole, didn't he? Well. He meant so much to her that she dropped her career for a while; she wasn't able to work. He meant so much that she became ill, she spent a good deal of time in a hospital. And how do you think she felt last night when she learned that Hogan was going to marry another woman?"

I didn't answer him. I knew now why Greta had been so strangely silent about her past, why I had been so shocked at the change in her. I shook my head at Lambert.

"I know," Lambert said. His voice was a little gentler. "You're a friend of hers; you can't believe she would commit murder. Well, maybe she didn't. There's a woman named Vivien . . . Mrs. Troy, did you know anyone named Vivien?"

"No," I said. "I only got to the boat last night. Vivien who?"

Lambert shrugged. "We don't know. There were letters in Hogan's room from her. It might help if we could find her." He turned to Jeff. "Troy, you're a detective from New York. You should be able to locate her for us."

"Would you like me to try?"

"I don't care what you do. And now—if you'll excuse me . . ."

We found a cab that took us to the parking lot. We walked down the cinder roadway to the boat. A policeman stopped us on the middle of the gangplank. It was all right, we learned, for members of the troupe to come aboard. It was not all right for Jeff.

Jeff didn't argue. "I'll see you later, Haila. Stay on the boat until I call for you."

"But where are you going? I'll go with you."

"You need some rest. I'll see you later."

I had just closed my door when the door to the room beside mine opened and closed. I heard slow footsteps drag across the floor. I ran out on deck and called. A toneless voice, Greta's voice, said, "Come in, Haila."

She was already stretched out on the bed. Wearily, she kicked off her shoes.

"Greta," I said, "they've let you go!"

"Yes," she said, "they've let me go."

"Is it all right now? Do you think—?"

"No." She stared vacantly at the ceiling. "I wish now that they had kept me there. Locked me up. This is worse. Letting me go, telling me to come back here. They still think that I killed Russell. I know what they're doing. If they give me enough rope, I'll . . ."

I waited a moment, then I said, "Greta, Jeff's here. He's going to help you."

"That's good of him." There was nothing in her voice but emptiness. "How is Jeff?"

"Fine, Greta. Things will get better now. Can I get you something? Tea, maybe?"

She turned her face away and didn't answer me. I left her then, quietly, and went back to my own room. Jeff had said I needed rest, and I found that he was right. . . .

I had no idea how long I had been sleeping, when the scream began. It shattered the quiet night like an explosion and went on and on, wild, hysterical. I ran out of my room and onto the deck and started toward the terrible sound, toward the river-end of the boat.

Ahead of me cabin doors were flung open. Trudi and Whitney Mallon lurched dazedly into their doorways, old Hilda stood trembling in hers. I raced past them, and heard their running steps behind me. Someone pounded up the stairs from the deck below.

I was the first to reach the back of the boat. I saw Ella Pinker beside the railing, leaning heavily against it, both hands covering her face. When she heard me the screaming came to a stop.

From the other side of the deck Joe Pinker and the policeman appeared. Joe was the first to reach his wife. He put both arms around her, and she stared at him blankly.

"Ella," he said, "Ella, what is it?"

Her hand pointed toward the boat's railing. "Greta," she mumbled, "it's Greta. She's there—he threw her in."

As a single person we surged across the deck and leaned out over the rail. The policeman's flashlight sprayed the water, and our eyes

followed its sweep. There was nothing below but the smooth, murky blackness of the river. Behind us, Ella Pinker was moaning, "No, it's no use. She's dead. She was so limp, her arms hung so—"

The policeman was shaking Ella roughly. "What did you see?"

Ella pulled away from him. "Don't touch me," she said. "Let me alone. I—I'll tell you." Struggling hard, she fought her way into coherence. "I was in my cabin by the window, sitting there in the dark. I didn't see them until they were right in front of me. They just—just came out of the shadows, and he was carrying her. I didn't know what was happening, I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything until I heard the splash in the river—and then he was gone."

"You didn't see who it was?"

"No. No, it was so dark. But it was Greta; I could see her long hair hanging down. She's down there now, Joe, she—"

"Easy, hon," Joe said. "Take it easy."

"I don't know what happened afterwards, Joe. I don't remember getting out of the cabin and over there to the rail. But I couldn't see her, I couldn't see anything."

The flashlight was sweeping the deck. It moved toward the railing, along it, and suddenly stopped. In its circle of light lay a shoe, a woman's high-heeled shoe. The policeman picked it up, carried it to Ella. She turned her head away.

Trudi Lang said, "Yes, that is Greta's shoe. I was with her when she bought that pair. Yes."

"Yes," Whitney Mallon said. "That's Greta's."

The policeman gave quick orders: "Miss Lang, take Mrs. Pinker to her room. Mallon and Taggart, the three of us will separate and search the boat. Pinker, call headquarters; use the parking-lot phone. Miss Rogers, you watch the gangplank. Scream if anyone tries to leave."

Joe Pinker was already scurrying up the slope toward the parking lot when I reached the gangplank. I stood there quietly, thinking about a pair of shoes.

There was something about them, something wrong. Greta had worn them in the play last night. I had been in her dressing-room afterward when she had kicked them off, wincing with relief. The heels were too high, she had said, the instep too tight. When this play was over, she said, she would throw them away.

That was it. That was what I had been fumbling for. I had seen Greta when she returned from police headquarters. She had been wearing a tweed suit, an old felt hat, heavy brown brogues. She

wouldn't have bypassed those brogues, forced her feet into pumps that hurt her. She hadn't been wearing them, I knew that now. That shoe had not fallen from Greta's foot as the murderer carried his victim across the showboat's deck . . .

A car moved slowly down the slope of the parking lot. Its headlights sprayed the field of cars. I caught my breath and hunched forward. The lights had snapped off. Now it was too dark to see the figure that was crouched behind the hood of a roadster. But I had recognized it at once; I had even glimpsed Greta Cole's face.

I kept my eyes hard on the roadster as I started down the gangplank. There was only a blur of movement beside it. Then, up farther where the street lamps cast a hazy glare, I saw Greta again as she moved quickly on foot, zigzagging through the rows of parked cars.

I ran up the hill past the little office, under the railroad trestle, along Duquesne Way. Ahead of me a trolley slowed for a stop. I saw Greta spring into its lighted doorway. The car turned onto the Sixth Street Bridge.

My legs were trembling when I stopped at the corner. There was no cab, no moving car in sight. The streetcar was gone now, lost over the rise of the bridge. Suddenly a cab appeared and pulled to a stop for a traffic light. I rushed to it and jerked open the door.

"Quick!" I said, "I have to get across the bridge; I have to catch the streetcar."

The driver shook his head from side to side as if this beat all. But the cab jumped forward and sped onto the bridge. Far ahead of us the streetcar made a stop, crawled on again. It rolled under the overhead of a railroad station, and my taxi caught it there.

Thrusting some money at the driver, I slammed the door behind me. I ran the length of the streetcar, looking into every window at every seat. I started back toward the bridge. Greta Cole was not on the trolley.

I came to a halt at the corner where the trolley had made its stop. It was here that Greta must have left the streetcar. She had come to this corner and, from it, turned into a side street. The marker on the pole said Reedsdale Street. I walked rapidly along it.

The street was quiet and empty. I heard the rush of movement behind me, but it was too late to even turn to meet it. A quick blow on my temple snapped my head sideways . . .

(continued on page 102)

"That was when Charles felt the first tremor of fear" . . .

THE OTHER MAN IN THE PINSTRIPE

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

For the twelve years he had been assigned to London his name had been Charles Mortlock, and before many of those years had passed he had come to think of himself as an Englishman born and bred. The great city, its stone buildings encrusted with tradition, its narrow lanes and monument-dotted thoroughfares, the Thames winding among its wonders, all had enchanted and hypnotized him until he almost believed the details of his carefully constructed cover biography.

On the countless weekdays when his mission gave him nothing to do he would walk the London streets, or ride the red double-decker buses, or if the day was warm, cruise down the Thames on one of the tourist boats. On countless Sundays he had taken the train to Cambridge and paced its learning-haunted lanes until he knew the city as well as if he had indeed graduated from King's College, as his carefully forged certificates attested. He found it easy to justify his growing obsessions, for he was after all supposed to be English and a Cantabrigian, and the more he knew of his purported environs the better he could play his part.

First there had been the cultural training at the service's secret instructional center nestled deep in the mountains, two years of grueling indoctrination in the Queen's English and the history and mores of the British people. The proper accent, the vocabulary, the common likes and dislikes of those among whom he would live were ground into him day and night. He was made to drink tea with his breakfast and to have a pint of bitter with lunch and to read himself to sleep every night with an Agatha Christie, and in time he grew to like the way of life very much.

When his training was completed he was posted to London, where

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his assignment was to monitor the media, report on which journalists were friendly to his country's interests and which seemed hostile. In cases of extreme hostility he might be ordered to terminate an offender, but in Charles's years in London that had happened only once, and the woman had been a fool.

The rest of his service had been wonderfully peaceful; he had only to read the daily papers and newswEEKlies, listen to the BBC broadcasts, and write periodic reports to his superiors. There were times when he thought his work made no more sense than that of Jabez Wilson, the character in a Sherlock Holmes story he had read in training school, the man who had been hired to copy out the Encyclopaedia Britannica in longhand. But, as he often reassured himself, it was not his function to question the usefulness of his mission.

And so over the years his tiny flat near St. John's Wood became home to him, his identity as an Englishman became the reality, and he hoped to stay in London for the rest of his life.

Until the day he began to sense that he was being followed.

On that bright Sunday morning in mid-June he rose early, brewed his pot of tea, straightened the flat, and wondered what he would do. His required reading on Sundays had been drastically reduced thanks to the months'-long strike at the *Times*. It would be a fine morning for a stroll along the Victoria Embankment, and when it became warmer he would take the boat from Westminster Pier down to Greenwich and catch the Thames breezes.

He dressed in the English businessman's civilian uniform, a black pinstripe suit, locked the front door of his flat behind him, and bought a Sunday *Telegraph* at the corner news-agent's to read at his leisure during the day.

It was down beneath the earth, sitting on a wooden bench in the St. John's Wood Underground station, waiting for the next tube to Charing Cross, that he felt it. The resurrection of long-buried instincts from training school. *Someone was watching him*. Very cautiously he peered over the top of his *Telegraph* and studied the people on the platform around him. Yes, it was that man standing against a pillar, the one in the black pinstripe that might have been twin to Charles's own. He was sure that same suit, that same English face, had been behind him as he had walked along Wellington Road to the tube station. And now the man was waiting for the next Jubilee Line train to Charing Cross, just as Charles was himself.

Could it be a man from British Intelligence? Charles shrugged off the question as paranoiac and went back to his newspaper.

The train clicked into the station and Charles took an upholstered seat in a carriage that was virtually empty. The other man in the pinstripe must have entered one of the adjacent cars. For a moment Charles was tempted to leap out onto the platform at the last second and wait for the next train just to put distance between himself and the other man. Then he dismissed the notion as absurd. The other man was on this train but there was no reason to believe both men had the same destination. The other might plan to exit at Baker Street or Bond Street or Green Park rather than take the tube with Charles to the end of the line at Charing Cross.

The train rattled swiftly through the tunnels to its terminus. At Charing Cross, where Charles left his carriage and strode along the maze of underground corridors to the escalators, he was careful not to look back until he was on the moving stairway lifting him to ground level.

Then he turned around. The other man in the pinstripe was ascending on the same escalator, about 30 steps behind him.

That was when Charles decided to take evasive action.

At the top of the moving stairway he reversed direction, raced back down into the depths on the descending escalator, half ran through the underground corridors until he was on the Northern Line platform. He took a Northern to Tottenham Court Road, then switched to the Central going east to Liverpool Street Station. There he ascended to the upper level, entered the British Rail ticket office, and bought a second-class day return to Cambridge. The guard had not yet opened the departure gate leading to the train, and Charles wandered carefully around the vast high-ceilinged station. There was no sign of the other man.

Charles felt a certain pride that his simple maneuvers had thrown off the follower—if follower it was—and was looking forward to his unplanned visit to Cambridge by the time he joined the queue outside the departure gate. He found a vacant seat in a second-class carriage and sat back in his corner, his newspaper on the luggage rack above his head.

Just as the guard's whistle blasted and the train was about to depart, Charles heard the beat of running footsteps on the concrete platform outside the train and looked out the window curiously. His head jerked back as if he had been struck. The other man in the black pinstripe, clutching his furred umbrella in his right hand, had just caught the Cambridge train.

That was when Charles felt the first tremor of fear.

The train rattled along its prescribed route while Charles sat frozen in his seat and tried to think clearly about the situation. Someone was indeed shadowing him. The reappearances of the other man had been too numerous to be coincidental. Now, who could the man be? It wasn't the regular English police and it wasn't a jealous husband or brother, for Charles had been careful not to violate a single law except when under orders, and he had restricted his private life to an occasional streetwalker.

There were only three possibilities he seriously had to consider. First, the man could be British Intelligence, in which case Charles knew he must report to his control as soon as possible that he had been compromised. Second, he could be from Charles's own side, a political agent sent to observe him and make sure he was still reliable. Charles knew that such checks were periodically made on agents in the field, but the observers were almost always veterans of the game and rarely so unsuited as to let their presence be known. The second theory was possible but not so likely as the first.

The third and most worrisome possibility was that the other man in the black pinstripe was opposition. And if that was the case, if the other side had discovered Charles's existence, he must be prepared at an instant's notice either to go into hiding or to terminate the pursuer or to take his own life.

As the train slowed to a stop at Audley End, an even more disturbing thought came to him. What if his own side had sold him out? After all, he himself could see little of great value that he had accomplished except for the termination of that beastly woman, which had happened three years ago. Might his superiors have decided to cut short his extended London holiday? But that was ridiculous! So much of his country's time and money had been invested in turning him into an Englishman. If his superiors were displeased, or thought his work in London no longer necessary, they could simply reassign him elsewhere. Why should they want to expose him, to eliminate his usefulness forever?

The reasoning failed to quiet his fears. For any number of policy considerations of which he would never know, it might be expedient that he be terminated.

When the train braked to a slow stop at Cambridge, Charles raced into and then out of the crowded station, elbowed his way through a knot of students in faded jeans and into a cab. "Bridge Street," he barked. The taxi eased into the stream of northbound traffic, toward the heart of the hallowed city. Ten minutes later he paid his fare,

slammed the cab door behind him, and started walking. It didn't matter where he went as long as he kept moving.

He followed the narrow sidewalks, passed in and out of the tiny lanes, traversed the lovely green quadrangles of the university's various colleges—St. John's, Trinity, Caius—and then paused for a while in the magnificent King's College Chapel, to sit and rest and think. It was the end of term, and Cambridge was full of students and their families, touring the city, drinking in pubs, punting on the narrow river that wound through the colleges like a miniature Thames. Hundreds of young couples were strolling through the streets, arms about each other's waists. The other man in the pinstripe could never follow Charles in such a throng. He was safe as long as he stayed in one place, here under the high arched ceiling, among the images of saints.

But when he had rested for half an hour he decided once again that he would be safer on the move, and so he left the chapel and emerged into the streets. Where was the other man? Actually, it had almost ceased to matter. If he knew his job he would wait at the station and watch all the London-bound trains until Charles returned, then board whatever train Charles took back. Why hadn't Charles thought of that before? All of Cambridge except the station was safe territory for him!

He spent the next two hours walking through the streets, drawing the calm of the city into himself until he was half convinced that the other man had been nothing but a daydream.

Then, turning the corner from Trinity Lane into Trinity Street at too brisk a pace, he collided with a man.

They both staggered and fell and Charles landed on the bottom, his breath whooshing out of him. The other man lurched to his feet, recovered his umbrella which had landed on Charles's leg, then offered a hand to help Charles up. "Sorry," he said softly. "Everything all right with you?"

Charles glanced up into the other's face and for a moment his heart stopped. It was the same English face that had followed him from St. John's Wood. The other man in the pinstripe. His manner looked so harmless, his voice so apologetic. Charles would have strangled him if Trinity Street had not been packed with passers-by. "Quite all right," he said, brushing himself off.

He stood erect, as if before a firing squad, looked his adversary squarely in the eyes, and willed him silently to move away. The other remained motionless as a statue in King's College Chapel.

Then, after an eternity seemed to have gone by, the other man nodded slightly. "All right then," he said in that same softly apologetic voice, raised his umbrella in a sort of mad salute, and strode away in the direction of St. John's Street.

Charles dared not move. He stood rooted at the head of Trinity Lane, praying for an empty cab to come by. When one did, he halted it with a desperate whistle. "Station," he said, and settled back among the seat cushions, his heart still pounding. His watch read 5:09. If the cab made good time he could catch the 5:20 back to London.

The driver dropped Charles at the station four minutes early. He paid the fare, then fumbled for change to call his control at the emergency number, from one of the station phones. No good. All three phones were out of order. He cursed, ran for his train's platform, and caught the train just as the guard's whistle blew. The train clicked through the green peace of the countryside, then entered London's suburbs and finally the city itself. At the Liverpool Street station he tried the emergency number again. This time the pay phone worked but there was no answer at the other end. Something died within him then. He felt abandoned to his fate.

His heart still thundered and his legs seemed made of gelatin. He took a cab to St. John's Wood, walked very slowly up the pathway to the door of his flat building, and let himself in. He locked the door of his own flat behind him, went to the liquor cabinet, and made himself a double brandy which he downed in one long swallow. Then he stumbled to the tiny round table in the corner, on which the phone stood.

And found the other man sitting in the armchair in the alcove.

"I hired a car in Cambridge," the other said in that same soft regretful voice. "Rather faster than British Rail, you know. I was certain you'd return here." He held an Italian pistol fitted with a silencer, but kept it pointed at the floor.

Charles sank back onto the sofa, calm now beyond caring, and waited for the shot. It didn't come. The other man sat motionless, smiling vaguely. Charles felt a slow peace filling him like the hush of the London dusk, and knew that he was already dying. He looked at the other's umbrella, lying on the carpet beside the chair.

"You've seen it then," the adversary said. "One of those concealed hypodermics. The recipient isn't supposed to feel a thing. You didn't, back in Trinity Lane, did you?"

Charles tried to reply but his mouth muscles refused to work, and

he knew he had only a few minutes left.

"I used the least painful poison known to us," the other went on. "You see, I *am* quite grateful to you. Four years ago, by pure reasoning, I convinced my own superiors that the other side must have posted an agent here to monitor the media. I really wasn't all that certain, but I wanted to be assigned to London. Then I discovered that you really did exist. For the last two years I've known precisely what your mission was. I've followed you everywhere, and you never noticed. You were accomplishing nothing, and so I felt no urgency in reporting that I had located you. But my control has grown impatient and it became a matter of my being reassigned or of terminating you and thus being allowed to stay on here and hunt whoever is sent to take your place."

Charles's head lolled against the back of the sofa. The other's words were relaxing him, helping him drift into slow sweet sleep. He scarcely heard the final question his adversary asked.

"And how could I bear to leave this magnificent city?"

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Q558

"Mr. Kornen surprised everyone in his suburban neighborhood" . . .

A VERY ORDINARY MURDER

by **ROBERT TWOHY**

Mr. Kornen surprised everyone in his suburban neighborhood by murdering his wife. He had seemed a mild, rather inward-turning man, well regulated and beyond the age of violence. The neighbors read the story in the morning *Chronicle* and felt the hard bright awareness that celebrities feel. There was the name of their street—Cecilia Way. The whole San Francisco Bay area was reading about this man who had risen from among them, and identified them.

Mr. Kornen was 48, a teacher of mechanical drawing at the near high school, as competent, probably, as most. On weekends he performed proper suburban chores—mowing, raking, pulling weeds, fixing a leaky faucet, changing a tire on his eight-year-old car. He said hello to his neighbors and talked briefly, in a totally flat voice, to his neighbors' children, urging them to not walk on his flowers or sit on his car or torture the smaller ones among them; and at neighborhood parties he got a little high on bourbon-and-soda and made everyday utterances to which nobody paid any attention. Everyone thought he was a good enough sort and no one cared about him one way or another.

His wife was older than the other women on the block, childless, a long lean person who took two drinks or sometimes three and then sat and smiled indistinctly around at people and seemed to be somewhere else, but not in a way that was theatrical or impolite. No one knew anything about her and no one thought about her at all, except when looking at her directly, and even then there was nothing to think about her, except that she was sitting there.

The morning of April 19th Mr. Kornen swung off in his car, and then there was stillness about his house. Later the housewives who lived nearby were to say that they sensed something wrong at his

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house, but how this could have been is not clear—no blood leaked from under the door and no smell or decay came from the windows or the chimney. The house was no stiller than it always was, early in the morning.

Other cars moved out of driveways as people drove off to their daily deadening routines. In the houses radios and TVs went on; and salesmen in clean sound cars drove up and got out with bright and go-getting and tragic expressions on their faces, and strode purposefully to doorways and tried to sell things to wives who felt that they were being intimidated. The young mailman, dreaming of himself as the new John Travolta, came up the block, distributing envelopes containing mostly advertising messages and urgent appeals from charities and credit departments. The small children, those too young to be disposed of at school, darted about and played or hit one another, and laughed or screamed. Dogs came and went. Finally it was almost lunchtime. And a blue-and-white police car appeared, not sensationally but quietly, sliding up in front of the Kornens' house.

From near windows housewives watched two police officers walk to the door, and one of them rang the bell. The policemen waited, then looked at each other and nodded, and the bell ringer produced a key. He opened the door and the two went in, the door closing behind them.

The key had been given to them by Mr. Kornen. Mr. Kornen had not gone to school that morning; he had driven around in aimless fashion, parking occasionally to watch pre-school-age children playing and fighting in parks. About 11:00 he had driven to the police station and diffidently stated that he had something to report.

He was composed as he told his story, but pale and somewhat tottery; the police thought he'd better sit down for a while. They brought him coffee, and asked for the key to his house.

Mrs. Kornen was found in her bed—a woman of tremendous stillness always, and never more so than now. She had been strangled with the belt of Mr. Kornen's bathrobe.

Soon another police car arrived. This one contained Mr. Kornen, somewhat energized by coffee; two more officers were with him. They all went in the house. Then two more cars, unmarked but somehow official-looking, pulled up. Then an ambulance came. The neat little house got quite full of people. A traveling TV unit arrived. Housewives stood on their lawns and watched, and walked back and forth, and talked in low voices; some of them went back in their

houses and fixed their faces, in case they might be interviewed for the Six O'Clock News. Two of the prettiest were.

The schoolchildren came home and screamed back and forth and shoved and hit each other. Dogs came and went. Drivers heard the news on their car radios and hurried over and drove slowly by the house. Shopping and vacuuming and early-afternoon daytime dramas on TV were neglected. Finally Mr. Kornen emerged from the house. A Mr. Tait, a rising young bank officer who had just been declared obsolete by his bank, said, "What happened, Alan?" Mr. Kornen dropped his eyes shyly, and shook his head.

The police, blank of eye, walked through Mr. Tait, shepherding Mr. Kornen back to the police car. Mrs. Kornen, sheeted, was carried out of the house on a stretcher, arousing interest in her neighbors that she had never aroused before, and was put into the ambulance. Other people came from the house, and one by one the official cars moved away. But a stream of lesser cars drove slowly up the street, as housewives and Mr. Tait talked among themselves and felt illuminated and real.

Everyone then said what a fine woman Mrs. Kornen had been, how much inner dignity she had possessed, how she had never got into neighborhood squabbles or disgraced herself at a party; and in this way everyone let everyone else know that he or she was someone who spoke only good of the gone. It was better to talk about the former Mrs. Kornen than to be silent, because talking about her made her factual, and not mysterious and brooding. She was Mrs. Kornen, departed. Talking about her in kindly tones kept her that way.

Mr. Kornen was asked by the police why he had done it. He said, "I think I just kind of snapped." He responded politely and seemed willing to help. He spoke of arguments between them—arguments about money, about relatives, about TV programs, about a motorcycle he had almost bought 14 years ago, about why she couldn't fry an egg so it wasn't either hard or runny. He said, "A lot of little things, all building up." His explanations made sense, after a fashion, but he seemed not quite convinced that they accounted for what had happened on the morning of April 19th.

The police did the routine things they do, when seeking a more substantial motive than offered—they had nothing in particular against Mr. Kornen, but if he had a secret reason for his crime, they wanted to uncover it. They found that he and his wife were more or less impoverished, like just about everyone in the neighborhood;

that if he were depraved fellow-teachers and students were not aware of it—and no neighbor had ever suspected him of lusting after another woman. Finally, the police tossed in the sponge—nothing they turned up showed the track of the beast.

But Cecilia Way was sure there was more to the murder than had been brought out; the women were convinced there *was* another woman, or, more probably, a girl—one of the girls at the high school; and the men well, yes, it didn't seem likely, but women have kind of a feel for such things. Actually what women have a kind of feel for is drama—and where was there any drama in the motive Mr. Kornen had advanced? It was totally dull. The women became positive, and their husbands gradually concurred, that Mr. Kornen had planned to flee with the high-school girl; then, smitten by conscience, had returned to face the music alone—with his phony chatter of tensions and snappings. And the police had not found evidence of the girl because they had not done their job well enough.

So the drama remained, despite the official verdict, and the mystery remained: which of the 1,248 girls at the high school was the one?

Mr. Kornen had done a service for his old neighbors. He had done more for them with his one deed of violence than he had ever done in all his years of peace; he had given each of them a sense of having been on the edge of something valid. That day became a benchmark in the long roll of their lives—a day they would always remember.

The other days faded into one another, with jobs, children, watching TV, laundry, car troubles, bill dodging, hating welfare recipients, watching TV, having martinis, buying new dresses, buying new power drills, watching TV . . . the routine things faded as soon as they were done, and were forgotten. But the deed that Mr. Kornen did that April 19th lingered in their minds. It was something definite, and they had been on the edge of it, as close as you can get without actually doing something definite yourself.

Plea bargaining got Mr. Kornen a sentence for murder in the second degree, and they took him off to Folsom.

That's all there is to tell about a very ordinary murder.

“Q”

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 548th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . bright, breezy, and brimming with humor . . .

The author, Katherine Patrick, was thirty-four years old when she submitted her first attempt at writing fiction. She has been "a lot of things"—department-store clerk, Avon lady ("in the toughest territory this side of Dodge City"), cost accountant, proof-reader, and freelance photographer. She is "an avid student of Latin and Greek, and my hobby is getting taken by unscrupulous dealers in movie memorabilia."

Well, so long as she knows she is being conned . . . One thing is sure: we'll be hearing more from Katherine Patrick—and the sooner the better . . .

ONE THING I CAN'T REMEMBER

by KATHERINE PATRICK

I think my trouble is I watch too many old movies. They give me ideas. In the one I saw the other night, Barbara Stanwyck was planning to kill her husband and make it look like an accident. I wasn't paying too much attention at the time. I just watched the picture because I liked the way Fred MacMurray could light matches with his thumbnail. But I think now that the movie may have made more of an impression than I thought. I'm not saying it was Barbara Stanwyck who gave me the idea to kill my George; but I'm not saying it wasn't, either. It sure as hell wasn't Fred MacMurray's thumbnail.

Another reason I blame old movies for the trouble I'm in now is that the guys in them always made George look so bad by compar-

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ison. Take Paul Henreid, for instance, in that scene from *Now Voyager* where he lights two cigarettes and then gives one to Bette Davis, all the while fixing her with that smoldering glance. George didn't smolder much, and if he ever lit two cigarettes he'd smoke them both. Besides, George himself was lit most of the time. He was one of those guys who don't think they're having a good time unless they're in a coma. A real prize, my George. One of Nature's noblepersons.

I never would have married him except that he was handsome in a sleazy sort of way, and he didn't seem like such a creep in those days. It wasn't until we were legally joined that he felt free to be himself. That was when I began to realize that in the Big Game Show of Life I hadn't exactly picked the secret door.

And things didn't get any better. Age withered and custom staled the hell out of George's infinite variety, and by the time he hit middle age he was a bigger jerk than ever. He was also a lecherous jerk. He believed in bestowing his sweet favors on as many women as possible, apparently feeling they were too good to waste on just one. Since George's idea of a really smooth line was "What are you savin' it for?" his opportunities for sweet-favor bestowal were somewhat more limited than he would have liked. But he did the best he could.

That, as it turned out, was his undoing. And, damn it, mine.

There is a tavern in our town called Ralph's Bar and Grill where I sometimes go to get away from George. It's a greasy little place that tries hard to be quaint. (On one wall, for instance, there's a mural of a lot of peasants frolicking, obviously the work of an artist whose actual experience with peasants, frolicking or otherwise, has been somewhat limited.) I liked Ralph's, though, mostly because George didn't. He said it had no class. (For someone who would drink Aqua-Velva if you poured it over ice, George sure was sensitive to ambience.) When I went there, I could always be sure of a couple of Georgeless hours.

So yesterday afternoon, while my hero was sitting in front of the TV set dipping his beak in a glass of bourbon and watching Roller Derby, I decided I'd rather look at the peasants than him, so I took myself off to Ralph's. I found a table with a good view of the mural, and settled in for the afternoon. Painted on the wall right in my line of vision was an extremely hearty young man in *liederhosen* who seemed to have three nostrils. (I think one was a flyspeck.)

I was working on my third Bloody Mary and dreamily contemplating the young man when suddenly something loomed between me and those three nostrils, something that spoke my name and seemed very glad to see me. It took me a moment to re-focus my eyes, and then I saw it was Margaret, good old Margaret, whom I'd gone to school with, and whom I hadn't seen in years.

The young man on the wall wasn't any heartier than we were as we greeted each other. When our round of gleeful chirping had died down, we sat and ordered ourselves some more drinks, and then I had a good look at her. She had on one of those frosted wigs—dynel, but nice—and a blue polyester pants suit. Most women who wear them look as if they just came from a Tupperware party, but Margaret could carry it off. She was a good-looking woman. It's true she did have a couple more rings around her torso than when I last saw her, but then I'm not exactly too young to go steady myself.

We did a little reminiscing about the days when we were not exactly the shining lights of the senior class of Warren G. Harding High. As we talked, I noticed she seemed a little preoccupied.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"Yeah, sort of."

I tried to look appropriately sympathetic. Margaret played with her glass for a couple of minutes, making more rings on Ralph's table, and then decided to confide in me.

"I've just been dumped. He didn't even try to let me down easy, just gave me the old kiss-off. Said it was time to move on, for God's sake. A real free spirit. A regular vagabond lover.

"And what kills me is that I don't know why I was so hung up on him to begin with. He isn't bad-looking, but he's juiced half the time, and he isn't exactly the personality kid even when he's sober. He has these really disgusting habits, like he'll put a bunch of Life Savers in his mouth and suck on them until the holes get big enough, and then he'll take them out of his mouth and stack them on his little finger. It's really disgusting."

Now I damn near swallowed my tongue when she said that because I knew only one guy who had that particular dippy habit, and the last time I'd seen him he was watching the Roller Derby.

I took my wallet out of my purse, found a picture of George, and held it out to her.

"Is that the guy?"

She didn't say anything; she seemed to be having some trouble with her face. But the answer was obvious.

"That's my husband," I said.

"Oh, my God," she said.

We had another drink.

"Don't worry about it," I told her. "You're not the first, not by a long shot. If the women that George has, shall we say, dated heavily since we were married haven't exactly been legion, it isn't because he hasn't been in there trying. I suppose I should divorce him, but I know damn well I'd never pry him loose from a nickel of alimony, and I guess living with him beats selling pencils on the corner. Not by much, though, especially if I found a good corner."

Margaret was chewing her ice cube so savagely I was starting to worry about her fillings.

"He's gotten so bad lately we can't even let a respectable Avon lady in. And our last cleaning woman had to quit—George kept following her around trying to guess her weight while she was vacuuming."

As I went on about George and his bimboes, I noticed that Margaret was getting lipstick all over her front teeth from chewing on her lower lip. Then she started mumbling, "I could kill him," and calling him all kinds of interesting names. (She didn't actually use any words I hadn't heard before, but she used them in such new combinations that it did my rancorous little heart good to hear her.)

We were both pretty well oiled by this time, and along about the fourth time she said, "I could kill him," it started to sound like a good idea. The fifth time she said it, I told her about Barbara Stanwyck. God, I wish I hadn't done that. Or at least, if I had to bring up Barbara Stanwyck, I should have told her about *Stella Dallas* or something. But I didn't. I filled her in on Barbara's plan to bump off her husband and make it look like an accident. Margaret thought that sounded like a really interesting movie, and we ought to discuss it some more. So we did, and somehow after a while the scenario had changed and we were the stars, and old George was the leading man.

"Tell me again how Barbara was going to do it," said Margaret.

By this time I was pretty fuzzy on the details. "I think she was going to push him off a train."

"But we haven't got a train." Margaret never misses a trick.

I thought for a while. "We have a window."

"How high up?"

"Eighth floor."

Margaret was starting to cheer up.

"Our bedroom windows overlook an alley. One of them's warped shut, but the other one opens okay," I said.

We thought about it some more.

"Yeah, but would anybody believe it was an accident?" I said. "It isn't easy to fall out a window. Even for George."

The light in Margaret's eye died when I said that, but a moment later it was back.

"All right, maybe they wouldn't buy an accident. But what about suicide? He could leave a note. Do you have a typewriter?"

"Yeah."

"We could type up a note, all about how he was just too sensitive for this ugly world, and then we get him over to the window and see if he can fly. Of course we'd have to wait until he's drunk."

"In that case we can do it any time."

The room was getting very warm, and for a minute the young man in *liederhosen* had six nostrils. But I pulled myself together. Homicide called for a clear head. Also pluck, and stoutheartedness and resoluteness. "Let us now be up and doing/ With a heart for any fate," and all that.

"Let us away," I said.

So we paid the bill, and with a little difficulty, awayed. (The first difficulty was in finding my Toyota, which I had hidden at the curb in front of Ralph's. That done, we had a little more difficulty finding my apartment building. But we prevailed.)

The TV set was still on in the living room when we opened the door, but George wasn't there. We found him in the bedroom, lying on top of the bedspread. He was drooling a little. I pried open one of his eyelids. He didn't even twitch. So far so good.

I opened the bedroom window and looked down at the alley to make sure it was completely deserted. We didn't want any inconvenient bystanders. (And God forbid George should land on a perfectly good cat.) The alley was clear, but I was a little worried about Mrs. Goldman's air conditioner, two floors down from us. I didn't really think it jutted out far enough from the wall to break his fall; still, I'd have been happier if it weren't there.

But the other bedroom window didn't open, so it was either use this one or give up my dreams of widowhood, and besides, we didn't have all day to worry about details like that. We had to work fast while George was still anesthetized. He'd be understandably miffed if he woke up while we were launching him.

I got out his portable typewriter and dug up some paper and while

George snored softly, Margaret typed his farewell note. "I can't bear this life any longer. It's better for everyone this way." Brief but poignant, we thought. She accidentally signed it Gorge, which spoiled the effect a little, but we thought the cops would find a typo or two entirely understandable, given George's state of mind (and the alcohol content of his blood). We left the note in the typewriter, figuring that would make it easier to find.

We then turned our attention to George. Between the two of us we got him into a sitting position without disturbing his slumbers. But though we'd counted on his being unconscious, we hadn't realized that that in itself would create difficulty, for while George had all the animation of a stunned ox, he also had its maneuverability. We had to haul his dead weight off the bed and over to the window.

We managed, however, half leading and half dragging him across the room. Then we propped him up between us so that he was more or less standing in front of the window, while Margaret and I tried to catch our respective breaths. We had almost caught them, and were getting ready for the liftoff, when suddenly George's face began to lose its look of contented stupefaction, as if the suspicion had just then begun to penetrate his brain that this was *not* the best of all possible worlds after all, and somehow, in some way he couldn't understand, things weren't going his way.

He began to resist. He tried to pull away from the window and away from us. We held on harder and pulled back, and he began to grab at the furniture to stop himself. A chair went over, and then a table and the lamp on it, and God knows what else; this was no time to worry about tidiness. I *was* worried, though, about Margaret's wig. If George ended up in the alley with a fistful of dynel, we had a lot of explaining to do. Fortunately, he was too busy grabbing at more substantial things.

When there was nothing else for him to hold on to we got him over to the window again. He made a grab for the sides of the window but the frame was too narrow for him to get a grip on. Then he seemed to lose consciousness again, and as he began to slump, I shoved at his back and Margaret hurled herself at his rear end and he went out.

He cleared Mrs. Goldman's air conditioner by a good two feet.

I was in a panic to get out of there before somebody discovered George's body, but Margaret pointed out that we'd have to straighten up the room to remove all signs of a struggle; so frantically we

scrambled around putting everything to rights and then sprinted for the living room, shutting the bedroom door behind us. I threw myself onto the couch and lay there watching all the little silver commas swimming around in front of my eyes and hoping my heart would start up again in the near future.

Margaret was made of sterner stuff; while my brains had turned to Cream of Wheat, hers were still in good working order. Right away she turned up the volume of the TV set. "When the cops get here," she said, "tell them we were watching TV and didn't hear a thing. And pay attention to the show, in case they ask any questions."

It was then about seven. While we waited, I practised looking widowed. After a few tries my performance wasn't exactly Oscar material, but I figured it would do the job.

A little after 7:30 the doorbell rang. It was a pudgy cop in a Smokey the Bear hat. He looked very unhappy. There was another one standing behind him, evidently his partner. I invited them in. The chubby one, who'd apparently lost the toss, asked my name, and then identified himself. (His name was Grover—cops should be named Bart, or Clint, or something. I got a Grover.) He took off his hat and stood there for a minute, passing the hat from one hand to the other.

"I'm afraid there's been an accident, ma'am."

He seemed to be memorizing the pattern in my carpet.

"I'm afraid we have some bad news," he went on.

The hat went from his left hand to his right.

"Your husband was found in the alley behind this building. He seems to have fallen from a great height."

The hat was back in his left hand.

"He's dead."

I stared at him with my best look of stunned disbelief. "But I don't understand. How could he have fallen . . ." I let the stunned belief slide into sudden agonized comprehension. "He's been so depressed lately, but I never *dreamed* . . . And all this time we thought he was in there sleeping." I put my hands over my eyes. I thought that was a nice touch.

Grover was patting my arm awkwardly.

"Lady, is there anything I can do? You want to lie down? You want a couple aspirins?"

I didn't answer, too broken-up for speech. He gave me a few more pats, then told me apologetically that he'd have to check the apart-

ment. I nodded. He left his partner with Margaret and me and disappeared. We heard him go into the bedroom.

He was back in a couple of minutes, and I had the feeling right away that Grover and I weren't buddies any more.

I was sure of it when he started reading Margaret and me our rights.

They took us down to the station house and booked us on suspicion of murder in the first degree. That was last night. Today, when my advisory hearing was over, they took me to the county jail and locked the door on me.

There's not much to do here, and I've had a lot of time to think about what we did. In spite of the fact that I was a bit loaded, I can recall almost every detail. There's just one thing I can't remember, just one question that's driving me nuts.

Right after we launched George, while we were rushing around straightening up the bedroom, while we were removing the evidence of a struggle, while we were frantically making everything neat and tidy—

Which one of us closed that damn window?

"Q"

introducing

SHIZUKO NATSUKI

**one of Japan's most popular
mystery writers**

Here's what we wrote about the author in Ellery Queen's JAPANESE GOLDEN DOZEN (Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1978): "A graduate of Keio University, where she majored in English Literature, Shizuko Natsuki attracted notice with her first novel, *THE PASSED DEATH*. She is one of the few women detective writers in Japan, and each year she produces an average of one long novel and fifteen novelets. In 1973 her bestseller, *DISAPPEARANCE*, won the Mystery Writers of Japan Award. Many Japanese critics have predicted that Shizuko Natsuki will become known as the 'Agatha Christie of Japan,' preeminent in the field of 'women's psychological suspense.'"

Shizuko Natsuki has published 35 books in Japan, and her stories are extremely popular. "The Pawnshop Murder" is her first appearance in an American magazine—the first, we hope, of more translations to come . . .

THE PAWNSHOP MURDER

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

66 **I**ll be off then."

Eiko Horikoshi was 42 and the owner of a prospering pawnshop. As usual, she was smiling when she said goodbye to the shop manager, the assistant manager, and the clerk.

"Goodbye," they called to her as they watched her rather plump figure disappear out the door. It was 7:40 and since the Horikoshi

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Pawn and Loan Shop closed at eight P.M., the young clerk, Naomi, started to put away the gems and watches.

The shop manager, Tsunemoto, was at the counter talking to a young man in a leather jacket who looked as if he were either a student or laborer. The young man had placed a camera on the counter in front of him and Tsunemoto's eyes glinted behind his gold-rimmed glasses as he studied the form the young man had filled in.

Tsunemoto was only 36 years old and already manager of the shop. He was shrewd and energetic, contrasting strongly with the assistant manager, Tsuji, who was never likely to rise above his present position.

"How much were you hoping to get for this?" the manager asked, picking up the camera and looking at it closely.

"I thought you might be able to give me about forty thousand yen."

"No, I can't give you that much. You see, they've stopped manufacturing this model and that reduces the value considerably. I can offer you fifteen thousand—that's my best offer."

After a few minutes of haggling the young man settled for the figure that Tsunemoto offered, and thrusting the fifteen thousand, minus one month's interest, in his jacket, he slouched out.

On one of the walls of the shop was a placard giving the rates of interest on loans from five thousand to five million yen, the rate becoming smaller as the loan increased in size. Being in a good location near one of Tokyo's larger railway stations, the Horikoshi Pawn and Loan Shop catered to a much better class of customer than its competitors in the suburbs and dealt mostly in share certificates, jewelry, and other small but valuable items.

Above the notice of interest rates, in a position that made it easy to see, was a list of the shop's rules:

Highest prices paid for popular items and easily disposable merchandise.

Lower prices paid for hard-to-sell items.

The shop itself was small, about sixteen square yards in size, with a counter running across the width of it near the door; the back part served as the shop's strongroom.

"I've got to go over the ledgers tonight," Tsunemoto said as Tsuji and Naomi struggled to close the shop's heavy shutters. Looking up, they could see his tall skinny form in front of the open door of the strongroom.

This vault was only about six square yards in size and two of its walls were covered with shelves filled with TVs, cameras, golf clubs, mah-jongg sets, and various other items people had pawned. Beyond another thick door set in the rear wall of the strongroom was another strongroom of about the same size, this one lined with cabinets containing the more valuable items—stock certificates and all kinds of jewelry.

When Naomi and Tsuji locked up, both of these doors were open; but this was not unusual as Tsunemoto often stayed late to check the items in the strongrooms against the shop's ledger.

Tsuji said goodbye and hurried off, and Naomi, after going back inside for her bag, soon followed. Being next to Tokyo's Ikebukuro Station, land was at a premium and the surrounding buildings all huddled close to each other. The entrance to the pawnshop was in a gloomy alleyway. The building opposite was a windowless, rather seedy, 24-hour coffee bar where about six months before, the customers had all become unconscious from the lack of oxygen.

Naomi had graduated from a high school in Saitama prefecture the previous year, and although she had wanted to enter a bank or a large financial company, the competition for that kind of position had been too much for someone of her easy-going nature, and she had ended up at Horikoshi's. While she was still at school, she had dreamed of being a career girl in one of the large companies, but she had been at the pawnshop for a year now, and often she heaved a sigh of disappointment as she walked out of the shop into that stuffy, dirty alleyway.

She was complaining to herself as she closed the shop's stainless-steel door when she suddenly stopped with a cry and crouched back toward the entrance.

Somehow the middle finger of her left hand had got caught in the closing door and it hurt so much that for a minute she could hardly breathe.

Gradually the pain subsided, and then giving another sigh of dejection, she turned toward the station.

It was now the middle of October, and as she walked she could feel the cold seeping through the soles of her shoes. She had a date with her boy friend Kumazaki at the coffee bar near Shinjuku Station at 8:30.

Kumazaki, far from being the glamorous businessman of her dreams, was a freelance reporter who had made friends with her after frequent visits to the pawnshop. He was a large-boned hirsute

young man and generally he took Naomi out to dinner and the movies about twice a month and seemed serious in his intentions toward her.

Naomi hurried to her date.

The next morning Naomi arrived at the pawnshop a bit later than usual, turning into the alleyway that led to the shop at about 8:40. The shop opened at nine o'clock, but Naomi had to be there by 8:30 in order to tidy up first. When there had been a second girl in the shop, they had taken turns coming in early, but since the other clerk left, Naomi now had to work longer hours.

Halfway down the alley she saw Tsuji standing round-shouldered in front of the steel door of the shop, fumbling in his pocket for his key. Tsuji always arrived at exactly 8:40, regular as clockwork.

Hearing footsteps behind her, Naomi turned around and saw Eiko Horikoshi step into the alley; she was wearing a bright blue suit.

"Good morning, Ms. Horikoshi," she said. "You're early today."

Eiko had lived alone in an apartment in Mejiro since her husband died and usually she visited her other shop before coming to the Ikebukuro branch. As a rule she didn't arrive in Ikebukuro until about eleven o'clock.

Giving Naomi a vague answer, Eiko hurried on to the shop. She looked worried, and there was something about her manner that made Naomi quicken her pace to where Tsuji had finally succeeded in finding his key.

He put the key in the lock and tried to turn it.

"That's strange," he said, shaking his head in disbelief. "The door isn't locked."

Twisting the knob, he pushed and the stainless-steel door swung back.

"I suppose Tsunemoto must have forgotten to lock it last night."

"Maybe he's still here," Eiko said quickly. "I had a call from his wife this morning."

"His wife?"

"Yes, she says he never came home last night but that when she rang the shop, no one answered."

Inside it was pitch-black; the shutters on the windows were still down.

Tsunemoto's shoes were lying by the entrance.

Tsuji hurried to open the shutters. By the light that came in through them and through the open door they could see an empty

noodle bowl on the counter. There was nothing unusual in this as it was obviously one from the shop where Tsunemoto always ordered noodles when he worked late. What was odd, however, was that nowhere in the cramped interior of the pawnshop was there any sign of Tsunemoto himself.

No, it was too early to say that; there was still the strongroom in the rear; its door was closed.

Eiko went to Tsunemoto's desk, and opening the top drawer, took out a key attached to a large wooden tag. This was the key to the nearer strongroom—the key Tsunemoto was supposed to take home with him at the end of each working day.

Eiko looked over at Naomi and Tsuji for a moment, then walked over to the door of the strongroom.

To open the strongroom one had to first put the key in the lock, dial the combination, then turn the key. The only people who had access to the key and knew the combination were Eiko and Tsunemoto.

Eiko set the combination, turned the key, and then, with Tsuji's help, pulled the heavy door open.

Inside, the lights were on and the door separating the two strongrooms was open, allowing them to see through to the farther room.

Both rooms seemed to be in a disorderly state, with one of the drawers in the jewelry case half open, and a watch from the shelf lying on the floor. In the nearer of the two strongrooms one of the golf bags had fallen over, and lying beside it as if embracing it, lay Tsunemoto. Seeing his pale and twisted features, Naomi felt faint, remembering the occasion when several people had almost died of suffocation in the coffee bar across the alley.

"It is clearly a case of suffocation. Due to the strongroom being perfectly fireproof, once the door is closed no air can circulate at all."

Detective Inspector Danto explained to Eiko in a deep, rich voice what must have happened. The police still hadn't finished their investigation, but Tsunemoto's body had been taken away to the morgue. The body had already been cold when it was discovered, and the ambulance men could do nothing but confirm that the shop manager was dead.

"There have been a lot of cases like this recently. Why, not so long ago there was that affair in the coffee bar across the way."

In this accident five people, including the staff, had suddenly

collapsed in the windowless room. Another customer, seeing what was happening, managed to crawl to the telephone and call for an ambulance before he too became unconscious. Luckily, all the people involved recovered after a couple of days in the hospital, and the police recorded it as an accident. It had been late at night and the customers had been there for several hours. With no one going in or out, the door had remained closed, and before long all the air in the room had been exhausted.

"Nobody died that time, but in the same month two seamen on a Chinese ship in Kobe harbor suffocated after the hatches were closed on them. And a ship's hold is much bigger than this strong-room of yours."

Inspector Danto had been in charge of the investigation at the coffee bar and he seemed to have developed a special interest in this kind of case.

"By the way, when you all went home last night at about eight o'clock, was Mr. Tsunemoto already working inside the vault?"

He looked beyond Eiko to where Tsuji and Naomi were standing.

"That's right," Tsuji answered in a strained voice.

"And where was the key to the strongroom at that time?"

"I suppose it must have been in Mr. Tsunemoto's desk, as usual."

Generally, Tsunemoto would open the first strongroom with his key when he arrived just before nine o'clock. However, the middle door—the door between the two strongrooms—was never opened until Eiko arrived at eleven o'clock. The farther strongroom held the more valuable items and certificates, and only the owner was in possession of that key.

To lock either vault, though, no key was necessary. Anyone could lock the doors; all that was needed was merely to push them and twirl the combination locks. During business hours the key to the first strongroom was kept in Mr. Tsunemoto's desk, and the combination lock of that door being left open, one had only to turn the latch to open the door.

"Does that mean that the door could have closed of its own accord while Mr. Tsunemoto was working in there? After all, it's impossible to open the door from the inside even when it's only on the latch."

"Of its own accord? No, I don't think so. The door is much too heavy to move by itself."

Eiko, Tsuji, and Naomi all said the same thing.

"I think it's impossible that someone could have locked him in by mistake. You see, there is an emergency alarm which you can ring

from inside the farther vault. But being night-time, not even that could help poor Mr. Tsunemoto." Eiko's voice was subdued.

"What? You mean you've got an alarm system?"

"Yes, last month someone got locked in a butcher's refrigerator and died. When I read about it in the papers, it gave me the idea, so I had the alarm bell installed."

The button was fitted in the corner of the rear vault, and when pressed it rang a large alarm bell in the shop. When the police pushed the button, however, nothing happened, and after checking the wires, they found that they had been cut by a pair of wirecutters just where the wires entered the room.

It was then that the police first considered foul play, and when Eiko checked the contents of the vaults, it was found that two valuable rings, one diamond and one ruby, were missing. It suddenly became very likely that while Tsunemoto was working alone the night before, someone had broken in, held up the manager, probably with a gun, taken the two rings from the farther strongroom, and locked Tsunemoto in when the intruder left. After that the criminal had cut the wires leading to the bell and escaped into the night.

"I wonder how long the air lasted," Eiko said.

And I wonder what time he was locked in, Inspector Danto thought, before answering Eiko.

"How long the air lasted? That can easily be determined from the autopsy. We can check the time he had his noodles delivered, then work out when he died by seeing how far the noodles were digested."

He glanced over at the bowl on the counter, then continued, "If we know what time he died, I think we can calculate when he was locked in by checking on his respiration rate and the amount of oxygen available in the room. I've never heard of a case of this type before, but luckily one of the assistant professors of forensic medicine at J University specializes in cases of suffocation. I think we will probably go to him for help."

This was assistant professor Miyahara. Even Naomi knew his name since he had been interviewed by the newspapers after the accident in the coffee bar. In the article, reference had been made to his experiments with rats which enabled him to calculate to a very narrow margin the length of time a human being could live in a fixed area before exhausting the air.

"We can be sure that Mr. Tsunemoto was all right at eight o'clock last night, but just in case, I'd like to know what you were all doing last night."

So saying, he glanced over the three people in front of him. Suddenly his eyes were caught by Naomi's middle finger—the nail was bruised and the rest of the finger was swollen.

"How did you hurt your hand?" he asked.

"Oh, that. I caught it in the door . . . over there."

Naomi half turned in panic and indicated the steel door to the shop.

"When was this?"

"Last night, as I was leaving."

"You said you left with Mr. Tsuji last night. Didn't you?"

"Yes, but I was a few moments behind him and I hurriedly closed the door—"

Naomi's voice grew smaller until she broke off in mid-sentence. Both Eiko and Tsuji were staring at her hand with horror, as if this was proof that Naomi had slammed the door on Tsunemoto and had caught her finger in it.

"The people from the Kiyoken noodle shop stated that Tsunemoto ordered the noodles at eight fifteen and that they were delivered at about eight thirty. Therefore, if one assumes that he ate them straight away, according to the amount of digestion and various other body functions, he must have died at about two o'clock in the morning."

Naomi was telling Kumazaki everything she had learned from detective Danto's second visit. Kumazaki had been to Sendai on business the morning the murder was discovered and it wasn't until six o'clock the following day that Naomi had finally been able to get in touch with him. After she told him what had happened, they arranged to meet as soon as she finished work at Horikoshi's.

"Since they have a reasonably accurate time of death, Danto says that they're going to ask professor Kazutoshi Miyahara at J University to give them the approximate time the crime was committed."

"Time of the crime?" Kumazaki asked. He was 27 years old, well built, dark-skinned, and always looked unshaved. His voice was his best point, though, being soft and cultivated, and not matching his looks at all. When he had come to Horikoshi's to pawn his watch or tape recorder, it had been this gentle voice that had first attracted Naomi.

"Yes, the time that the door was closed. You see, once the door was closed, he wouldn't be able to get any fresh air."

"Oh, I see. Have they come up with an answer?"

"It seems to have been very difficult. They say the professor worked all night and even made another series of experiments with a rat."

To begin with, the police calculated the volume of the two strong-rooms. The center door divided the space into two rooms of almost exactly the same size, each room being 5 feet wide, 10 feet deep, and 6 feet 6 inches high—or a volume of 325 cubic feet. At the time of the crime the middle door had been open, which meant that there was a total of 650 cubic feet. The main problem, however, was that both rooms had many articles in them. The farther room was lined with drawers for the jewelry and stock certificates, while the nearer was filled with TV sets, golf bags, and other goods. After these had all been measured, it was discovered that they accounted for about 20 percent of the total volume, leaving 520 cubic feet, or 14.4 cubic meters of air.

Professor Miyahara used these figures in attacking the problem, taking into account both the physiological and physical data he had learned from his experiments.

"He says that the average adult male inhales four to five hundred milliliters of air with each breath, but of this one hundred to one hundred and fifty are expelled again without being used by the body. The same adult will, on the average, breathe approximately twelve times a minute, but this depends on the temperature and the amount of exercise done by the subject. So, considering all this, the air in the strongrooms could have lasted from four to six hours."

"Does that mean that even with five hundred and twenty cubic feet of air you can only live for four to six hours?" Kumazaki asked.

"Yes, the tests they made with rats all gave the same result. They put rats in all sizes of glass tanks and measured the time it took for them to struggle and collapse. However, as they didn't know how much air a rat breathes, they made several experiments measuring the size of the rat and the container, and then correlated this with the known facts about humans."

In the case of the rats, when they were put in a case five times the size of their bodies, they lived for approximately 45 minutes. When they were placed inside a case ten times their size, they managed to survive for two to two and a half hours. No matter how many times the experiment was repeated, they all lived for this length of time.

Therefore, if one takes a man to have a mass of 0.7 to one cubic

meter, he should be able to live for about two hours with seven cubic meters of air, and for more than four hours with fourteen cubic meters of air.

Detective Danto had explained all this in detail, not only because he was interested in it professionally, but because he wanted to hear the alibis of all the staff.

Professor Miyahara's results were almost exactly the same as those that had been published in the newspaper after the accident in the coffee bar, and they all admitted having read that account.

"Tsunemoto died at two in the morning, and as the crime took place four to six hours earlier, it means it happened between eight and ten in the evening."

"But he had the noodles delivered at eight thirty, didn't he?"

"Yes, we checked the staff at the noodle shop again, but they all stick to their original testimony. They did add, however, that after he took the noodles he was heard to lock the shop door on the inside."

This meant that Tsunemoto must have known his murderer. The door was fitted with a peephole and it would be extremely unlikely that he would have opened it to a stranger at that time of night.

"The detective said that it could possibly have been an outsider, but since the murderer had been inside the vault and knew all about the bell, he suspects us most of all."

Naomi sounded quite upset.

"That means it's likely that between eight thirty and ten o'clock someone from the shop went back and killed Tsunemoto."

"Yes, that's why they asked for all our alibis."

The previous day, the police had heard their alibis, but as they weren't sure at what time the crime had been committed, they hadn't gone into much detail. Now, however, that they knew the murderer had acted between eight thirty and ten o'clock, they concentrated on that period.

"I told them I was here with you nearly all the time in question."

Naomi looked around the dark interior; the juke box was pounding out music at high volume.

"That's true," Kumazaki said, "but unfortunately the police never put much faith in alibis provided by friends."

"And I don't think it's very likely that the waitress will remember us," Naomi added, sounding even more depressed.

Naomi wasn't the only suspect. Tsunemoto, being in the kind of business he was, appeared to have made many enemies. When loans

were overdue, it wasn't unusual for him to go to the debtors' companies and demand payment, thus making his customers lose face in front of their colleagues.

Then again, it was possible that Tsunemoto had often accepted stolen goods, and discovering them to be so, had threatened the thieves with the police.

There were rumors at the shop that Eiko and Tsunemoto had had some kind of personal relationship, and after his death these rumors had been repeated until even Tsuji seemed to suspect Eiko. One day he said to Naomi, "If you ask me, I don't think the boss could have opened the new shop at Ekoda if it wasn't for Tsunemoto's skill in business. I can't help thinking that between them they managed to pull the wool over the tax office's eyes and make a lot of money on the side. If that was so, the boss wouldn't have wanted him to talk about it.

"You must have noticed how Tsunemoto was becoming rather swell-headed recently, treating the shop as if it were his own, and I suppose he was getting in the boss's way."

However, both Eiko Horikoshi and Tsuji had sound alibis from eight thirty to ten.

On the evening of the murder Eiko had left the Ikebukuro shop at 7:40 and gone by car to the other shop at Ekoda where she arrived at 8:15. She had stayed there until she went back to her apartment at Mejiro a little before eleven, and her late husband's parents, as well as staff members who lived behind the shop, were willing to testify that she hadn't left earlier.

Tsuji had gone to a bar with two friends and stayed until 10:40, after which he had gone home, in the housing estate at Takashimadaira.

The only one in the shop who didn't have a firm alibi was Naomi.

That evening a new lead turned up. Tsunemoto's wife discovered that the notebook her husband always carried was missing from his effects. His wife lived in Fujimidai with their young son and she had been going through his things after the funeral. She phoned the shop to see if the notebook was there, and Naomi answered her call.

"Yes, it was a slightly large, brown leather notebook. My husband always carried it in his back pocket and would make all kinds of notes in it. He was a very methodical man, you know. Anyway, I'm sure he had it with him that day when he left for work."

Naomi was certain she remembered having seen the brown notebook. In fact, she was sure she had seen it in Tsunemoto's back

pocket as he stood in front of the nearer strongroom when she went home that night. When the body was found, however, although the ledger was standing on one of the shelves, there was no sign of the notebook.

Tsunemoto's wife also got in touch with the Ikebukuro police station and on hearing about the book, the official inquiries took a different turn.

Wasn't it likely, while he was locked in the vault, that Tsunemoto would want to write a dying message?

If one assumed he knew who was responsible for taking the rings and locking him in the vault, it would seem quite logical that after trying to open the door and pushing the button of the emergency bell, he would want to tell others who was killing him. The best way to do this would be to leave a note, and where better to write it than in the notebook that he used numerous times each day.

The murderer must have come to realize this and returned to the vault later to retrieve the notebook before anyone else could see it. Returning to the scene of the crime would have been easy if, after locking Tsunemoto in the strongroom, the murderer left the combination lock where it was and knew where the key was kept.

Once this new development occurred, it became necessary to check the alibis of all the suspects from ten o'clock onward. This cheered up Naomi. After she had left Kumazaki, she had gone to visit a friend at Akabane. She had arrived at 10:30 and stayed until morning. Her friend and her friend's sister who shared the apartment both swore that it would have been impossible for Naomi to have left their apartment during the night.

Neither Eiko Horikoshi nor Tsuji could supply the police with a firm alibi for the time after two in the morning. Tsuji had been with his family, he said, but that didn't give him a strong alibi, and Eiko had been on her own since she left the Ekoda shop at eleven.

But Naomi didn't feel relieved long. The police next considered the possibility that Eiko and Naomi had worked together. They thought that Eiko had bribed Naomi to lock Tsunemoto in the safe and then Eiko had come back and taken the notebook. Naomi could tell what they were thinking because the questions from Inspector Danto became more and more to the point.

However, Naomi knew better than anyone else that she was innocent and therefore she didn't really suspect Eiko either. Why, even Kumazaki could have done it. He was a regular customer at the shop and knew the layout; he could have committed the crime

before he arrived at the coffee bar that night. After all, he had been a little late. But Naomi hated herself for even suspecting him; she realized that the strain must be getting to her.

Two days later Kumazaki phoned Naomi, sounding very excited and saying that he had a new theory about the case. They arranged to meet at a coffee bar, and when Naomi arrived late, he seemed hardly able to master his impatience and started talking right away.

"This case is unusual in that the time the crime took place and the time of death are separated by several hours. In order to pinpoint the time that the crime took place, it was necessary to calculate back from the time of death, and using a very complicated system at that."

"That's right," Naomi said. "When they had the accident in the coffee bar opposite, the same idea came up and we discussed it a lot at work."

"Professor Miyahara's calculations were published in the papers, weren't they? I think that whoever did this must have read that article and calculated that Tsunemoto could live for only four to six hours in the vault. But even though it was very likely that Professor Miyahara would be called in to give his opinion, the criminal can't have been sure that the results would be the same."

"But it must have gone according to plan—I mean that's how the murderer was able to arrange an alibi," Naomi said. "Tsunemoto was locked in four to six hours before he died, which means he was locked in between eight and ten o'clock, and anyone who has an alibi for that period is in the clear."

"Of course," Kumazaki said, "I'm not going to say that Professor Miyahara is wrong, but what if the crime didn't happen the way the police think it did? That would make all their calculations worthless."

For a moment Naomi held her breath in excitement. This was the first time someone had looked at the case from another angle, and it may be that Kumazaki had found the blind spot in everyone's reasoning.

Kumazaki sat deep in thought and she watched him as he put some sugar into his cold coffee and started stirring it.

"You said that the boss put the emergency bell in the vault last month, didn't you?"

"Yes, she thought of it after she read about a butcher's boy being locked in the refrigerator by mistake."

"Are there any other pawnshops with a similar alarm in their strongrooms?"

"Not that I know of. There are several with burglar alarms under the counter, but the workmen who put in the bell all laughed and said we must be the only pawnshop with one. But the boss was insistent. She said that it must be put in right away before she forgot about it."

"Maybe she had it fitted especially for the murder."

"What? In order to cut the wires?"

Kumazaki nodded to indicate that she was on the right track.

"But it would only go to prove that the crime was committed by someone in the company who knew about the alarm."

"No, not only that."

"But what other effect would it have?"

The two of them stared at each other, both engrossed in this line of thinking while they sipped their coffee.

"Seeing that the wires had been cut, what did the police think? They supposed that they had been cut in order to stop anyone hearing the bell and rescuing Tsunemoto, and this would mean that Tsunemoto could have gotten into the rear vault to press the button."

"Yes, but he would be able to push it, wouldn't he? After all, it isn't as if he had been knocked unconscious before he had been locked in, and when I went home that night I saw that the door to the rear vault was open. The next morning when we found the body, that door was still open, so—"

"Yes, and on top of that, the wires had been cut. It makes it obvious that the middle door had been open all the time. But maybe that was the reason why the bell was fitted in the first place—to reinforce that idea."

"Do you mean that the middle door was not open?" Naomi's voice quavered. "That it was *closed*?"

"Try looking at it this way. If the middle door was closed from the time that Tsunemoto was locked in until he died of suffocation in the front vault, *he would have had only half of the air*. That means he would have died *in two to three hours, not four to six hours*. This means that the crime was committed not between eight and ten, but *between eleven and twelve o'clock*."

Naomi closed her eyes and tried to work it out.

Suppose that while Tsunemoto was working late that night, he had a call from Eiko Horikoshi asking him to stay until she could come over.

Eiko left the shop in Ekoda before eleven, and could easily have got to the shop in Ikebukuro by 11:30. After she arrived she would have entered the rear vault with Tsunemoto and after locking the middle door would have waited for the chance to lock him in. This would mean that Tsunemoto would have only two or three hours of air, although, as the front vault held the larger articles, it was probable that he had even less.

Eiko would have calculated that he would be dead by two in the morning, and gone back to her apartment until then. When she returned to the shop, she would have knocked on the nearer door, and having made sure that she got no reply, opened it. Tsunemoto would be lying on the floor beside the golf bag, his face contorted with agony, and next to him would be his notebook.

After opening the middle door with her key, Eiko went in and took the two rings to make it look like the act of a burglar, and as she left, she would have noticed any message in the notebook and taken the notebook with her.

After cutting the wires leading to the bell, she departed, leaving the outside door unlocked.

In this way, when the body was found the next day with the middle door *open*, it was certain the police would estimate that it took the manager four to six hours to die, thus setting the time of the crime at between eight and ten o'clock, a time when Eiko had a perfect alibi.

If one looked at the case this new way, it made the people with alibis for the eight-to-ten period seem the most suspicious. Naomi now realized she had figured out the truth: Eiko was the murderer. Confirmation? While anyone could close the door of either vault, *only Eiko could reopen the middle one.*

At about ten o'clock, when the phone boxes in the coffee bar were empty, Kumazaki nodded to Naomi and they both got up.

They went to the phone in the farthest corner and Naomi, picking up the receiver, dialed the number of the Ekoda shop, knowing that Eiko had gone there to do the day's paperwork. Kumazaki stood behind Naomi, using his body to screen her from the rest of the coffee bar.

The phone was answered.

"Hello, Horikoshi here." Eiko's vigorous tone came from the receiver.

"Is that you, Ms. Horikoshi? It's me, Naomi."

Naomi licked her lips nervously before continuing.

"It's about Mr. Tsunemoto's accident. I have just remembered something important that I didn't tell the police. I am going to call them now, but I thought I should get in touch with you first."

"Something important?" Eiko was almost whispering.

"Yes. On the day he died, Tsunemoto was already in the strong-room checking the goods against the ledger when I left. The thing is that when I looked, the middle door was closed and he said something about only checking the front vault.

"When we found the body though, the middle door was open and the whole thing just slipped my mind when the police questioned me."

"Rubbish, the middle door was open all the time!"

"Oh? How did you know that?"

"I—I—it was open when I left."

"But I was the last one to leave that day—apart from Mr. Tsunemoto, of course—and the door was closed then."

"But it can't have been—"

Eiko stopped in mid-sentence as if she realized that it wouldn't do to press the point. Then she continued in a cool voice.

"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake, Naomi?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It was something the detective said when he was interviewing me today that reminded me. He said that he couldn't find Tsunemoto's fingerprints on the button of the emergency bell in the far room and they thought this was a bit strange."

"His fingerprint on the bell?" Eiko murmured as if she had been taken by surprise.

"Anyway, I'm going to the Ikebukuro police station now and I'll tell them all I know."

Naomi paused, then strained at the earpiece; but all she could hear was the sound of Eiko's breathing. Just as she looked up at Kumazaki's tense face, Eiko started to speak.

"I'd like to talk to you first—before you go to the police."

Naomi nodded to Kumazaki. She would go to a dark, quiet place to hear what Eiko had to say, but he would be hiding nearby and would be a witness to everything that was said.

"Q"

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 549th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . You might say, the narrator tells it like it is . . .

The author, Maureen Noonan, was twenty-six when she submitted "Just One of Those Days." For three years she had been working at various jobs to put her husband through divinity school—from "grounds keeper at the Yale Golf Course" to "handling patient accounts at a psychiatric institute." Now that her husband is a minister in Connecticut, Mrs. Noonan would like to fill her time with reading, writing, drawing, enjoying rural Connecticut, playing racquetball and tennis, and "sleeping in the sun."

She calls her first story a "trying my wings" stage in her life. Happy flying!

JUST ONE OF THOSE DAYS

by MAUREEN NOONAN

So you want to know what happened, Sheriff? Well, you've certainly come to the right person. Straight from the horse's mouth, you might say. Except I dare anybody but me to say that.

Today started out to be one of those days when you wake up and know it's going to be a lulu. It was the kind of a day when you wish you could just crawl under your covers and wait till it's over. You must have had a few like that yourself, what with your line of business. Anyway, the boss doesn't care too much whether or not I'm feeling like a songbird when I open my eyes. He just wants me down behind that counter taking orders.

The boss is sure he's going to get rich if he just stays open long enough and pays his help little enough. Why, he could make a fortune just on the salary he's not paying me, not to mention the

© 1980 by Maureen Noonan.

price of a meal here. Me, I got some thoughts on that subject but I guess I'll spare you the details.

To get on with the story, I'm just watching the clock tick towards lunchtime when this big guy walks in the diner. The minute I spy him I say to myself, "Bess, old girl, you sure picked it when you figured today wasn't going to be the kind of a day you mark on the calendar with one of those smile faces." Yes, sir, one quick look at that ugly mug and I know I'll be earning my pay, such as it is. The guy doesn't do anything to change my mind either, let me tell you. He just about takes his life in his hands when he growls at me, "Hey, lady, give me something that doesn't taste like you just picked it up off the street."

Now, insulting the food is one thing, you understand? I mean, nobody comes in this place to fill up on good home cooking, believe me. In fact, part of the charm of the place is that you can put the food to good use elsewhere, like for puttying or insect repellent. Rumor has it that Joe Hanson even used our mashed potatoes to do some repair work on his stucco house. Said it did a fine job, too. Some day soon we're all going to take a drive out there and check it out for ourselves.

Our cook, Bill's his name, he's been in that greasy pit for 30 years and we're all kind of proud of the fact that he hasn't changed in all that time. And I'm not just talking about his style of cooking either, if you get my drift. Bill was a mechanic before he came to the diner and he puts his food together like he's still back in the garage. His grilled cheese sandwiches look like a car's been dropped on them from ten feet up. Anyway, I could go on all day about Bill and his magic fingers but I'll spare you. You look like you got a weak stomach.

Like I was saying, Sheriff, I didn't give a hoot that this mug said the food stunk, but it was that "Hey, lady" that really stirred my blood. I grew up on a farm with four older brothers. What's that? Now I'm glad to hear you're a farm boy, but I'd appreciate it if you'd let me keep my train of thought going. As I was trying to say, I grew up on a farm with four older brothers who had no idea that I was a girl. Seems like the bigger they got, the bigger I got, the stronger they got, the stronger I got. What do you think I weigh? Not bad, about 190. Anyhow, I take a lot of pride in the fact that nobody with an ounce of sense would look at me and think I was a lady. Seems like a lady should be kind of fluffy and smell like flowers, you know? I like the smell of good honest sweat myself. It lets the guys know

that I have to work just as hard as they do.

Now you see why this bum got me riled? I decide to give him a few choice words or maybe the old cold shoulder and show him just who's a lady around here when all of a sudden I hear him tell me to hand over the cash. That's another sign that he wasn't too bright. Everybody knows we barely take in enough to keep the register from rusting. Most guys, like old Fred over there, they just like to sit for a spell where there's no one to give them trouble.

Well, when I hear him tell me to hand it over, I turn around to give him my toughest look, the one that can melt lead, and I'm looking right into the barrel of a sawed-off shotgun.

Did I scream? Not to call you stupid, Sheriff, but do I look like a screamer? I looked that gun in the eye and hit the No Sale key. Now the creep is herding everyone behind my counter. Old Fred looks like this is the first time he's moved in a month. Could be right. Cindy Parker's checking the guy out like maybe he could be a customer for her—private business, if you get my drift. I'm thinking that the boss isn't going to be too pleased with me giving away the peanuts that we've collected—might spoil his sixty-year get-rich-quick plan. There's not too much that I can do though, with that chump's little metal friend staring at me.

I'm trying to figure a way to get our jerk to put down the gun and then bammo, the guy gives me the answer. While he's sitting there his stomach starts growling like a wild bobcat. Bill would be pleased as punch that his food was actually making someone hungry. Me, I figure the slob must not have eaten in a month. Probably forgot what real food was supposed to smell like, you know?

So I think, this is our big chance. No one can eat and hold a gun on three people at the same time. If he should happen to let his guard down for just a second I could clang him a good one with one of the boss's heavy-duty plates.

First I've got to sell him on the idea of eating something though, so I give him my best smile. Nice teeth, don't you think? Anyway, I turn on my best smile and tell him that I don't blame him for ripping my boss off. I tell him the boss is a creep who deserves everything he gets. In fact, I told him, he's even welcome to the whole darn kitchen for all I care. I can see that he could really use some food, so I lay it on a little thicker. I tell him that Bill makes the best bowl of chili this side of the Mississippi, that the chili recipe was his dear old Mom's, who was a cook for a rich family that only got the best.

Well, I see him practically drooling, so I give Bill the high sign for a big bowl of beans. I can hear old Fred's gears clicking away when the chili passes his nose and I give him a look that would stop a train. We all just kind of watch while the guy shovels in a few mouthfuls and I'm getting worried. He's not letting up his grip on that gun for anything. I'm cursing myself that I didn't order a nice tough steak when all of a sudden the guy lets out a groan that would curl your hair, if you had any that is.

Well, Sheriff, I know I've kind of run on here, but I'm not pulling your leg. You asked me to tell you how we caught the guy and I swear it's just like I said. I never got a chance to break a plate on his skull because Bill's cooking got to him first. That bowl of chili was so bad that the poor jerk's stomach just couldn't hang onto it for five minutes. He just let out that groan and doubled up in a dead faint. All we had to do was give you a ring and let you do the rest. He probably won't be sticking up diners for a while, wouldn't you say?

Now, I know you'd like to chat some more but the boss wouldn't take too kindly to my shooting the breeze all day. Come to think of it, I haven't been treating you too good. Can I get you something to eat?

NEXT MONTH . . .

13 **NEW** stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Rand)

H. R. F. KEATING (about Mrs. Craggs)

E. X. FERRARS (about a truthful witness)

BARRY PEROWNE (about Raffles)

BILL PRONZINI (about a dangerous game)

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

007: Book collecting bears no relation to book reading. Each is wonderfully exciting and important, but they should never be confused. One does not (or, at least, should not) buy a \$250 first edition in order to read it. By the same token, one cannot accumulate a shelf of used paperback reprints and call himself a collector. The sort of book which does the reader no earthly good whatsoever, but is the most valuable tool in a collector's library, is the bibliography. Readers of Ian Fleming and James Bond can skip the next paragraph.

Collectors of Fleming and/or Bond will be delighted to learn that there is, at last, a good descriptive bibliography of both. Iain (sic) Campbell has privately printed *Ian Fleming: A Catalogue of a Collection*. It is modestly subtitled "A Preliminary to a Bibliography," although it is a long stride in that direction. It regrettably contains only those items which the author has managed to add to his collection, and is thus needlessly incomplete, omitting many items known to exist and of no exceptional rarity. It is, nevertheless, of paramount importance to anyone seriously at-

tempting to assemble all the first editions of this important author and one of the most important fictional characters created in the 1950s. Copies may be had directly from Mr. Campbell at 22 Gambier Terrace, Liverpool 1, England. The price for the nicely produced paperback is \$6.00.

221B: If you have visited your local bookshop recently, you are no doubt aware of the endless flow of Sherlock Holmes material. If you've read this column before, you know I try to point out both the major new productions and those which can be called, charitably, minor works. Here, briefly, are a few small booklets of some interest, after which I promise not to bring up the subject again for a while.

More Baker Street Ballads by Charles E. Lauterbach. A handsome booklet, illustrated by Henry Lauritzen, edited by Edward S. Lauterbach, and published by The Scolist Press, P.O. Box 2579, Chicago, IL 60690, in an edition of 350 numbered copies (\$5.00). A variety of rhymes on various Sherlockian themes, ranging from the limerick to the sonnet, and from a monster

worm to the daintiest thing under a bonnet.

An East Wind Coming by Arthur Byron Cover (Berkley, \$2.25). A novel in which Sherlock Holmes is never mentioned by name, merely as "The Consulting Detective"—apparently a ploy to avoid copyright infringement which was destroyed when the publisher's cover line began with the words: "An immortal Sherlock Holmes . . ." And it's going too far to quote from one of the original stories ("His Last Bow") and change the key words to avoid plagiarism charges, while all the time retaining the essential structure and tone of the paragraph. For shame!

Death of a Scavenger by Keith Spore (Belmont Tower, \$2.25) is about Hugo Enclave, a great detective with a Sherlock Holmes complex. It's not as bad as it sounds, but Julian Symons did it better with an actor who played Sherlock Holmes and began to develop a nice healthy complex in *A Three-Pipe Problem*.

Vol. 1, #1: A new magazine in the mystery field is never bad news, and an ambitious periodical bearing the upfront name *Mystery* was released a short time ago. The first issue, an evident prototype of things to come, features an interview (with Ross Macdonald); a glossary of terms used in hardboiled fiction; an "Eye-Q" test; reports on a mystery writers conference and the Bouchercon; reviews; and two pieces of fiction. It's a pretty thin journal for \$2.00, but the intention is good and it deserves support. Planned as a bi-monthly, a year's subscription is \$10.00, and should be sent to MYSTERY, Box

26251, Los Angeles, CA 90026.

Sixes and Sevens: Donald E. Westlake should have three books out in 1980, after too long a wait. He's been doing so much film and television work that there has been little time for him to write fiction, but that will soon be changed. So will the subject matter. One of his volumes is a non-mystery.

Richard Levinson and William Link, creators of *Columbo* and countless other successful television series, films, etc., have written a complex and ingenious mystery play with an eye toward Broadway. If it does well at the prestigious Long Wharf Theater in New Haven, it should find a home for a long time on The Great White Way.

A recent poll of heavy readers in New York City revealed that mysteries are the favorite form of literature for 20 percent of those questioned—far in front of any other fiction and only one percentage point behind history and biography, which ranked first with 21 percent of the readers.

The Mystery Writers of America is flourishing to a degree unprecedented in its history, with new chapters in the Northwest and Rocky Mountains accounting for scores of new members. If you have published and been paid for a mystery story or book, fact or fiction, you are eligible for active membership; if you are a fan and supporter of this most noble genre, you are eligible for associate or affiliate membership. Dues are \$35.00 per year. Further details may be had by writing to MWA at 105 East 19th Street, N.Y., NY 10003.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

"A wise man believes only in lies, trusts only in the absurd, and learns to expect the unexpected." The somber voice of Roald Dahl is heard somewhere behind a swirling antique merry-go-round as the programs begin. The show is called *Roald Dahl's Tales of the Unexpected*, produced in England and syndicated now to major American cities, half hours devoted to the twisty macabre marking the return of a neglected form: the mystery anthology on television. It is a welcome return, especially as its host is so urbane and droll, so chattily sinister.

Dahl is an absolute master of the short story in which average people confront unexpected horrors from which there is no escape. He spends six months crafting and polishing most of his tales, which have been anthologized in such collections as *Someone Like You* and *Kiss, Kiss*. He has also done the screenplays for the James Bond thriller *You Only Live Once* and Ian Fleming's *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. He lives a quiet life in England with his wife Patricia Neal, and seems on the screen to be quite mild-mannered. His stories, though, are something else.

Some of the stories are familiar old friends, having been used on older radio and TV shows, especially *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, another good judge of the macabre. But I doubt few can resist a retelling of the tale in which the wife serves a leg-of-lamb dinner to the policemen

searching for the vanished weapon which bludgeoned her husband to death. Or the mysterious South American (in this adaptation Jose Ferrer) who bets a sailor his lighter will not flick ten times—the odds a fortune against his little finger.

Dahl's tales are small gems, without a wasted word, and just the right length for the half-hour format. And they are given a handsome dressing by Executive Producer Sir John Wolff (*African Queen*, *The Odessa File*, *Day of the Jackal*), with good players. Julie Harris is striking in two stories, first as a woman who schemes to conceal a lover's gift of a mink coat by pretending to get it on a pawn ticket (she winds up minkless), then as a harried wife who cannot abide being late—even if her tardy husband is stuck in a self-service elevator in an empty house.

Jack Weston, the gambling ocean voyager in *Dip in the Pool*, is exactly right as a man who finds his "sure-fire" bet on a transatlantic liner turned into a watery nightmare. Dahl's yarn of a so very ordinary rural bee-keeping couple with a sickly baby—*Royal Jelly*—climaxes with a sting of dread, suggested horror (as a matter of fact, I found the written story even more frightening than the adaptation). But the drama to me most eerily charming of all is *Skin*—in which an elderly vagrant artist (Derek Jacobi, who played Claudius in the PBS *I, Claudius*) recalls how his wife's form was tattooed on his back

long ago by a fellow painter. The tattoo was even signed. Now that painter is dead and has achieved posthumous fame. An elegant Paris gallery is displaying the friend's work, and our hungry hero displays his torso to the assembled patrons, to learn (as artist Spider Webb demonstrates in his outrageous new book, *Pushing Ink*) that tattooing can be high art—in certain circumstances. But separating the artwork from its owner provides a quick, queasy ending which is as brilliant as it is (indeed, are all the shows) unexpected.

Years ago a golden-age television teemed with good mystery anthologies—*Suspense*, *Danger*, *The Web*, shows hosted by Hitchcock and Rod Serling. It, too, was an art, and Dahl returns us to it, showcasing his own offspring and his own high wicked humor.

Another new television program now in syndication is *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson*, produced abroad—in of all places Poland—by Sheldon Reynolds, who in the mid-fifties pioneered Holmes on

TV with the Ronald Howard series (and, as well, brought us *Foreign Intrigue*, the first overseas espionage adventure show made for the medium). Alas, the new Reynolds effort has all the virtues and the defects of his first venture: a very youngish Holmes (Geoffrey Whitehead), a beefily solid Watson (Donald Pickering of *The Pallisers*, who is quite fine and says: "I'm certainly not portraying him as an idiot"), and weak plotting. Despite Anthony Burgess being retained as story editor, the original mysteries are very un-Doyle, and the adaptations fly far from their source. *The Speckled Band*, for instance, is reset in Bavaria. We see from the very first the dreadful "band"—the instrument of murder, and the wonderful confrontation between Holmes and a dueling-scarred "Count" Roylott. The incident in which the poker is bent and then straightened is dropped. A sluggish production, though well photographed, and the first Holmesian series filmed for American television in more than two decades.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Some detective novels that are regularly cited as cornerstones on checklists of the genre spend an alarming amount of the time out of print. One such is Philip MacDonald's 1924 debut *The Rasp*, Col. Anthony Gethryn's first case, now happily available in a new paperback edition (Dover, \$3.50). This example

of the English country house whodunit has its adherents and detractors among critics of the form. While I think some of the author's later novels—such as *Murder Gone Mad* (1931), *Mystery of the Dead Police* (1933), and *Warrant for X* (1938)—are more successful, *The Rasp* delivers some good detective

work and a humorous, readable style. The detective's romance, reminiscent of *Trent's Last Case*, seems quite intrusive here.

Gethryn presents one of the form's longer summations—fully fifty-eight pages remain after the killer is confronted and has confessed—and early in the going delivers an immortal sleuthing one-liner when he says, "I feel as futile as if I were Sherlock Holmes trying to solve a case of Lecoq's."

*** John Le Carré: *Smiley's People*, Knopf, \$10.95. Though this rich work demands a slow and careful reading, it engages the interest at once (unlike the author's previous novel, *The Honourable Schoolboy*). The plot is as solid and intriguing as any espionage thriller offers, and the author's distinction of style and characterization is rare. George Smiley, one of the great figures in mystery fiction of the last quarter century, acts as both detective and spy, and his final encounter with his Soviet opposite number Karla provides a fine conclusion. Thanks to this book, I may even give *The Honourable Schoolboy* another try.

*** R. B. Dominic: *The Attending Physician*, Harper and Row, \$8.95. Similar as they are in style and structure, the novels about Congressman Ben Safford have never seemed to jell quite as well as the books the same authors write (as Emma Lathen) about banker John Putnam Thatcher. This latest one, though, concerning Medicaid fraud, is undoubtedly the best of the series. The funniest scene describes the ceremonial meeting on the White House lawn, under threatening skies and among shivering politicians, of the

Chief Executives of the U.S. and Canada.

*** Isaac Asimov: *Casebook of the Black Widowers*, Doubleday-Crime Club, \$7.95. It could be argued that some of the accounts of Asimov's puzzle-pondering eating club are not so much stories as lightly dramatized essays in science or history, to which claim a fan will rightly answer, "So what?" Of these twelve cases, seven are from EQMM, two from IASFM, and three new. Of the new trio, "What Time Is It?" is especially clever, while the other two are among the series' lesser entries.

*** Lawrence Block: *Ariel*, Arbor House, \$9.25. A versatile pro enters the occult horror field with impressive results. The story concerns an unhappy family living in a creaking old house, the death of a child attributed to Infant Crib Death Syndrome, and the mysterious personality of the adopted daughter, Ariel. With a spare, everyday style understating the horrors, the plot develops along not-quite-expected lines to an ending that is inconclusive but oddly appropriate.

*** Ross H. Spencer: *The Stranger City Caper*, Avon, \$1.95. This is the third in an incredible series of book-length private eye parodies that seemingly owe as much to Vonnegut and Brautigan as to Hammett and Chandler. Chance Purdue's investigation of Stranger City, Illinois, and its all-left-handed minor league baseball team is more an offbeat religious allegory than a detective story. I'm not sure what Spencer's string of one-sentence paragraphs adds up to, but reading them is like eating peanuts.

*** J. Alexander McKenzie: *The*

Omega Document, Bethany Fellowship, 6820 Auto Club Rd., Minneapolis, MN 55438, \$2.50. Here is a well-written and well-constructed thriller of the espionage-and-conspiracy school served with a dose of fundamentalist Christian witness. The unlikely combination works remarkably well because McKenzie manages to integrate the message into the story without overt preaching and to keep the action just hard-boiled enough, though free of profanity and sex in the manner of a Forties movie.

*** John Anderson: *Festival*, St. Martin's, \$7.95. The account of the kidnapping of Chief Constable Piet Deventer's baby daughter, which may or may not be connected to the drug-related death of a girl at a nearby rock festival, is an English procedural recommended to fans of John Creasey's police novels. The well-constructed tale has a good final surprise and turns out a much better book than I thought in the early stages.

*** Dorothy Daniels: *Veil of Treachery*, Signet, \$1.75. For all her stilted prose and dialogue, Daniels can be a captivating storyteller, and this novel of New York theater in the late 19th Century shows her in top form. The heroine, though, has her exas-

perating moments and is definitely not cut out for the stage. She's no trouper.

** Josephine Bell: *Treachery in Type*, Walker, \$8.95. An elderly novelist on the comeback trail becomes the victim of plagiarism. The latest from a valued old pro starts very promisingly but fizzles badly midway, and the final revelation isn't enough to salvage it.

** Stephen Brett: *Some Die Hard*, Manor, \$1.75. Enthusiasm is the long suit of this hard-boiled-classical hybrid about private eye Rick Dugan, who solves (rather unconvincingly) the impossible stabbing of a man alone in a glider. The many literary and movie references recall Michael Avallone more than any other writer, but the man behind the pseudonym is Stephen Mertz, a widely published fan whose love of the genre (if not his grip on its techniques) is obvious.

** Margot Arnold: *Exit Actors, Dying*, Playboy Press, \$1.75. The first in a new series in the classical vein presents a promising pair of sleuths in middle-aged scholars Penelope Spring and Tobias Glendower, plus a promising background of movie-making in Turkey. But the story drags a bit, and a tantalizing dying message is disappointingly handled.

© 1980 by Jon L. Breen.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

THE LIGHT DAWNS

by *JAMES BIGWOOD*

"And so the fiend turned out the lights
To carry out his plots."
The brilliant Sherlock 'Ohms outshone
His dimmer colleague, Watts.

© 1980 by *James Bigwood*.

SCUTTLEBUTT?

by *SJAAN CLERC*

Though his job is to serve and to cater,
It's suspected that murder's his craft;
Could it be that just like the dumbwaiter,
The butler keeps getting the shaft?

© 1980 by *Sjaan Clerc*.

FACING THE MUSIC

by *MARK GRENIER*

There's a killer for hire known as Fritz
Who was forced into calling it quits
When, in Nashville this spring,
The police made him sing
And recorded the guy's greatest hits.

© 1980 by *Mark Grenier*.

DEATH IS A TROUPER

by **KELLEY ROOS**

(continued from page 55)

I was walking down Duquesne Way, my head still pounding, when a man darted across the street and came toward me. It was Jeff.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"Over on the North Side," I said irritably. "Getting hit on the head."

"What?" Jeff said.

"You used to hit me when I was looking. Now you sneak up behind me."

"Something has hit you! You're not making sense . . . Haila, listen." He took me gently by the arm. "I've got bad news for you. About Greta."

"I know about Greta, and it isn't true. It wasn't she who was thrown overboard. In fact, I was following her when I got smacked." I told Jeff all about it.

Jeff was frowning. "Haila," he said slowly, "let's keep quiet about this for a while. Until we find out what Greta's doing. And, Haila."

"Yes?"

"As soon as possible I'd like to talk to Ella Pinker."

"I'll arrange it. Jeff, what did you do when you left me?"

"I talked Lambert into letting me on the boat. I was in his office when the news came through about Greta's murder."

If Jeff hadn't put his arm through mine I could not have walked down the slope and up the gangplank to *The New Sensation*.

We found most of the showboat troupe huddled in the dining-room, silently staring into empty coffee cups. I introduced Jeff to the Captain, to Trudi and Whitney, to the adult Pinkers. The Captain bellowed for Hilda and, in a moment, she was pouring coffee for Jeff and me, for everyone.

Whitney Mallon said, "What are your plans for the boat, Captain?"

The Captain grunted. "The police will tell me my plans. They ain't yet."

I had been trying unsuccessfully to catch Ella Pinker's attention.

I had opened my purse to look for paper and pencil, when she rose. Stepping out of the others' line of vision, she pointed to me, to herself, then out toward the deck. She said loudly, "I'm goin' to turn in now. It's no good sittin' here like this."

I waited a minute, then motioned to Jeff, and he followed me out of the dining-room. The Pinkers' cabin was one of those on the river side of the boat, and Ella was waiting in it for us.

When she spoke her voice was barely audible: "I don't know who to go to. I can't go to the police and I can't go to anyone on the boat. One of us is the murderer, and it might be the murderer I was telling it to."

She was silent for a minute, and I heard her take a deep breath. "Tonight," she said, "it was so dark out there—I know now I made a mistake."

"About what?" Jeff asked.

"That wasn't Greta that—that was put in the water. It was just the blond hair that made me think it was. But this girl's hair wasn't long like Greta's, and—and there was other things, too. This girl was—"

Jeff said, "You think it was someone else who was killed?"

"That sounds crazy, don't it?" Ella whispered. "I know it does. Greta's gone. Everybody else is accounted for. And that was Greta's shoe they found on deck. But it wasn't her that was killed tonight. It was somebody else, some other woman with yellow hair. Don't ask me who."

I caught the faint break of footsteps moving away from the window. Jeff heard it, too. He said softly, "Someone's interested," and he moved toward the door. But the caution had gone out of the steps; they were scurrying down the deck. When we reached the door it was too late; there was no one in sight . . .

At breakfast we were informed that Detective Lambert would see us all at eleven. At eleven we were told that he would be delayed an hour. That went on and on; it was four o'clock in the afternoon when he arrived. Jeff was with him.

Lambert called us all into the dining-room and said, "Now, if I may ask a question: Who is this woman named Vivien?" The group sat in stony silence. "One of you knows; maybe all of you do. In her letters to Russell Hogan she speaks of being on the boat, she mentions some of you by name. And I'm going to find out about her if I have to stay all summer. . . I will see each and every one of you

in your cabins," he continued. "And when I find out what I want to know I'll leave this boat. And not before!"

The Captain and his troupe filed dismally from the dining-room, Lambert after them. Polly Pinker slipped into the kitchen.

Jeff put his hand on my arm. "Wait," he said.

In a moment Polly was back, munching a slice of bread. She started straight for the door, not looking at us. She was opposite Jeff when he spoke.

"Rita, Hedy, Lana . . . and Vivien," he said.

Polly stopped. "What?" she said.

"Rita Hayworth, Hedy Lamarr, Lana Turner, and Vivien Leigh. Hiya, Vivien!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Polly exclaimed.

"Vivien Pinker, you do so!" Jeff exclaimed back. "You're the Vivien who was writing to Russell Hogan."

"No, I'm not! I never . . ."

"Yes, you did. You wrote those notes that were found in Hogan's wastebasket."

"In his wastebasket!" Polly wailed. "Oh, no, don't say that! Not in his wastebasket! Russell didn't love me, I know that. But he was learning to! In ten or twenty years . . . if Trudi hadn't come along."

Jeff interrupted her: "Polly, where did you learn the language you used in those letters?"

"Out of magazines and movies. Did you read the one where I was desperate, where one smile from him could save me?"

"Yes, that was very convincing. Maybe you should be a writer, Vivien, not an actress."

"You won't tell Mr. Lambert on me, will you?" She was frightened.

"I'll have to," Jeff said. "But I'll see that he forgives you."

"Tell him I was very young," she said, "and very much in love."

"Yes, Polly, I'll quote you."

"And I think I'd better be the one to tell my mother and father. I think I'll be hysterical when I tell them . . . Thank you for being so sympathetic, Mr. Troy. Adieu, now."

Polly slipped away just in time to thwart my inclination to turn her over my knee and soundly spank her.

"Jeff," I said, "what about Greta?"

"I want to explain to Lambert about his Vivien and have a talk with the Captain. Then we'll look for Greta."

I waited on deck until Jeff had finished with Lambert. Together

we went into the Captain's stateroom. It was as barren and cheerless as a prison cell.

"Captain Taggart," Jeff said, "what did Russell Hogan expect to do yesterday?"

"Work."

"All day?"

"Rehearsal from ten to twelve. Dinner till one. Rehearse from one to five. Supper. Give a show. That's all day, ain't it?"

"Do you think he might have had plans to go anywhere?"

"My actors," the Captain said, "don't go no place on workdays. Got any other fool questions?"

"Yes," Jeff admitted cheerfully. "When do you think an actor should shave? What time of day?"

"Close to the performance as possible. So he looks clean on stage."

"Did Russell have a beard that needed to be shaved twice a day?"

"He had an ordinary beard. Like yours, like mine. Never heard so many fool questions outside a minstrel show. Where'd you learn them?"

"New York."

"Thought so."

"Good day," Jeff said.

"Thank heaven," the Captain said, and he said it again as we closed his cabin door.

We set out to look for Greta.

We were searching for a cab when I saw the streetcar crawling across the bridge to the North Side. We ran, and we made it.

"The trouble with this murder is there's no motive," Jeff said.

"What?"

"No motive for anyone—except Greta. Lambert and I went into that today. Hogan had no money, no property; no one gained financially by his death. No one had any reason to hate him—except Greta. And if Greta isn't guilty, then it's a murder without a motive. And that's impossible. Is that clear to you, Haila? It isn't to me."

The car was crossing the street where I had been ambushed and attacked. We got off it beneath the tracks of a railroad station and walked back until we found Reedsdale Street. I led Jeff to where I had been hit.

"You must have been close to the place Greta was headed for," he said. "If you'd been way off the track you wouldn't have been knocked out."

"That sounds logical."

"Thanks. Now Greta's been hiding out for a night and a day. She's needed some food."

"Yes."

We scouted around, and we were lucky. There was only one place in all that vicinity that sold things to eat. It was a dingy little joint, part delicatessen, part cigar and magazine stand, which seemed designed to serve the workers in the neighboring warehouses. Now, after the day's work was done, only the proprietor was in the place.

Jeff turned to me. "What do we do now? I'm at a complete loss."

"I'm not!" I said. I had had a sudden, happy inspiration, and I blessed my talent for remembering usually only inconsequential things. I stepped up to the man. "I'm looking for my sister," I said. "She just moved into this neighborhood and I've lost her address. I thought she might have shopped here."

"I don't remember seeing any girl," the proprietor said, "that could have been your sister."

"Well, maybe she didn't come in, maybe she telephoned. Do you deliver?"

"Yeah, we do. What's your sister's name?"

Jeff smiled at me and waited. Greta would not have given her right name. I smiled back at him; I wasn't stuck. "My sister," I said, "practically lives on roast-beef-and-cheese sandwiches. A slice of very rare roast beef and a very thin slice of American cheese." I held my breath for the answer. Was that still the number one taste sensation on Greta's menu?

"Roast beef and cheese," the proprietor said. "With chili sauce?"

"With chili sauce. Yes!"

"On white?"

"Yes!"

"Toasted?"

"Exactly!"

"Right around the corner. The Robinson Hotel. Only, it ain't a hotel, it's a rooming house. Top floor."

"You're a sweetheart!"

Out on the sidewalk Jeff patted my arm. "Haila," he said, "you *are* sly." His hand tightened suddenly on my wrist. He hesitated a moment, then pulled me along, not quickly, but at a strolling pace. "We have just passed a dark doorway," he said, "and in that dark doorway was Joe Pinker."

"Jeff, could he know about Greta?"

"He might have guessed."

"We've got to shake Joe."

"We do."

We walked past a decrepit building on which a weather-worn sign boasted that it was the Robinson Hotel. We moved away from the river, out of the industrial district into an old residential part of the city. We went through a park to a street called East Ohio and strolled along it. I glanced behind me. Joe Pinker was leisurely following us.

There was a small bar at the corner, and we went into it, out a side door, and into a parked cab.

We got away without Joe seeing us, and the cab took us to the Robinson Hotel. It was indeed a hotel in name only. There was no lobby, only a hallway wide enough to hold a narrow flight of stairs.

The fifth flight was the last one, and we stood in the corridor of the top floor. There were four doors. Three of them were ajar, their rooms vacant. The fourth door was locked.

"Greta, it's Haila. Haila and Jeff."

It was a long moment before the door began to open. It creaked open an inch, hung there, and finally swung in. Greta was walking backward, away from us. Her voice was flat, a lifeless monotone: "You've found me."

"Greta . . ."

"Do they know, too? The police?"

"No, just Jeff and I know. The rest still think that you . . ."

"That I'm in the river. They still think I'm dead. But when they don't find me in the river, then they'll know. They'll look for me, and they'll find me here. Just as you did."

"Greta, Jeff's trying to help you."

She looked at Jeff and seemed only then to recognize him. For a moment the tension left her and her lips almost formed a smile.

"It's going to be all right, Greta. It's bound to be. We know that you didn't kill Hogan and . . ."

She stopped him with a jerk of her head. Her eyes were closed when she said, "Do you, Jeff? Are you so sure I didn't kill him?"

I said, "Of course we know!"

"That's good," she said quietly. "It's good to hear that. Because, you see, I don't know."

Jeff went over to her and sat beside her on the narrow, ugly bed. He said, "Greta, what is it? What are you trying to say?"

"I don't honestly know whether or not I killed Russell. I don't honestly know about a lot of things I've done lately. I—I forget."

She rose quickly and walked to the radiator in the corner. She turned and, leaning against it, looked back at us. "After Russell and I were divorced I became ill. I was in a hospital for a long time. Not a regular hospital—the kind you go to when you've had a nervous breakdown. It was two years before I left it."

"You were well again," Jeff said.

She nodded. "I was well again, completely cured. The doctors thought so; I thought so, too. I went back to work."

"On the showboat?" Jeff asked.

"No, I had several other little jobs before that. I was fine, happy. It was good to be working again. Even when I came to the showboat and found Russell there, it didn't upset me. And that made me feel stronger, more confident than ever. You see, I had hated Russell when we were divorced. Actually hated him. But that was over, all over. I felt nothing for him now. He was an actor in the same company as I, no more than that. And I knew then that I was really well again. Then things began to happen . . ."

She stopped, and her eyes became thoughtful. It was as though she was considering whether to go on.

"Yes, Greta," Jeff said softly.

"It—it's difficult to tell you. I could tell a doctor, and he would understand, but . . ."

"You don't need a doctor, Greta," Jeff said.

"Thank you, Jeff. Yes, I can tell you and Haila. . . . Things began to happen to me. I'd find that I hadn't done something I thought I had, or had done something I couldn't remember doing. Oh, nothing big, nothing important. It was things so trivial that, individually, they were ridiculous. But when you added them up—they didn't add up. Do you understand at all?"

"I think so, Greta," Jeff said.

"I'd lock my door, then find I hadn't locked it. I'd lose things, forget where I'd put them. My alarm would wake me so early in the morning it would still be dark, and I couldn't remember why I had set it. The night you came, Haila, I thought I'd turned my electric iron off; I could have sworn I did. But when we went back to my room after the play, it was still on and the ironing board was smoldering. I tried to hide all this from the others. You know how people are about—mental cases. And that made it worse, so much harder."

"About the murder, Greta," Jeff said.

"Yes, now we come to the murder. I had been so upset about the iron the night before; I might have set the boat afire. I didn't know if I ought to keep on working. It might not be safe—safe for other people. I left the boat that night. I went walking alone to think about it. Thinking made it worse, it upset me more. When I got back to the boat in the morning, I *think* I went straight to my cabin. I *think* I washed up, and went to the dining-room and had a cup of coffee, then went back to my room. I *think* that the first time I saw Russell was when I heard the screaming and I saw his body on the floor. But I'm not sure. I can't prove it to anyone, to the police, to—even to myself."

"You didn't kill Russell, Greta," Jeff said.

"Didn't I? Can you prove that I didn't?"

She heard the footsteps before I did, quick, purposeful steps climbing the flight of stairs to this floor. She flung herself across the room, ripped open a door, and, stepping behind it, pulled it shut. The steps were in the hallway, moving toward us. Jeff stepped to the bridge lamp by the bed and snapped it off. We waited in complete darkness.

The knock sounded once, twice, and again. A moment later it was repeated, and then I heard the knob turn and the lock slip clear. I moved over to Jeff and put my hand on his arm as the door began to open slowly. The hall light was too feeble to show more than the outline of the man who slipped into the room. He closed the door behind him.

He was breathing hard from his climb up the stairs; I could hear the short, gasping breaths. Then I heard a scratching sound, and I knew it was his hands on a wall, groping for a light switch. In a moment he gave up his search, and a match flared in his hands. Held as it was, below his face, it threw the features into weird distortion. He saw Jeff and me at his side, and he reeled back, the match falling from his fingers. Jeff snapped on the lamp.

It was Whitney Mallon who stood gaping at us. His mouth closed and the fright went out of his eyes. He pushed a hand through his hair in a gesture of relief and said weakly, "Don't do that to me; don't ever do that to me again." Then he stepped toward us, his voice tightening. "Where's Greta? Where is she?"

"I have no idea," Jeff said.

The door in the corner was flung open. Greta came into the room, went quickly to Whitney's side. "I didn't know it was you, Whitney.

Not until I heard you speak."

"Greta, when you didn't answer my knock—when I found your door unlocked—I—"

"I'm sorry, Whitney."

"I didn't know what might have happened to you."

"I'm all right, really I am."

"Are you?" Whitney's eyes were on Jeff and me.

"It's all right about Jeff and Haila," Greta said. "They're my friends, they want to help."

"How did you find her?" Whitney asked.

"Through the delicatessen around the corner. We—"

Greta's voice broke in sharply: "Whitney, how did you know I was here?"

Whitney looked at her with a puzzled frown. "What?"

"How did you find me? What did you—?"

Whitney laughed and put his arm around Greta's shoulders. "Darling, you needn't try to protect me! Jeff has guessed already that I helped you get away."

"No! You've done nothing! I did it all myself, I—"

"Greta, stop. Do you think Jeff cares that I've kept you out of Lambert's hands?" He turned to Jeff: "We had to do it. It was the only way."

"It was a rather elaborate way," Jeff said.

Whitney grinned. "It was pretty good, wasn't it? But it had to be elaborate. If Greta had simply disappeared, the cops would have thought she was running away from them. If we had staged it as a suicide, they would have taken it as an admission of her guilt. It had to look like murder, so that they would go on looking for the murderer. As soon as they found him, Greta would be cleared and free."

"Then Ella," I said, "Ella saw . . ."

Whitney nodded. "Right. Ella saw nothing." He smiled. "Ella's a better actress than I ever hoped she'd be. I must remember to give her bigger parts. She managed everything perfectly. Even her act with you last night."

"When she said it wasn't Greta thrown overboard?"

"Yes. I knew you'd seen Greta. I was afraid you'd realize that Ella was in on this thing, and I didn't want that. We had to put you off the track for a while."

"Then it was you," I said, "who was listening outside Ella's room?"

"Yes. I had to keep in touch."

"And it was also you, you louse, who knocked me for a loop last night?"

"I'm sorry, Haila."

"Don't apologize," I said. "Nobody ever apologizes for hitting me."

"If I'd known then," Whitney said, "that you could be trusted, I wouldn't have slugged you." His voice slowed down and a challenge crept into it: "And you can be trusted, can't you? About Greta?"

"Of course," I said.

"Relax, Whitney," Jeff said. "Your plan isn't going to work unless the killer is found. Greta isn't going to be safe from the cops until then. We're trying to do that; we're on your team. And to be perfectly modest about the whole thing, you and Greta need us."

"We need all the help we can get," Whitney said.

"So now we all understand one another," Jeff said. "Greta." He was examining her face. "Have you had any sleep lately? That's important."

"I'll try," she said. "Maybe I'll be able to."

"I'll be here early in the morning, Greta," Whitney said. "With the latest news."

"Fine. Now all of you try to get some sleep, too."

We waited outside until Greta had locked the door behind us, then went down the stairs to the street.

Whitney said, "Seeing you was good for her. Knowing that you are helping. Jeff, she should be hidden out, shouldn't she? That was right, wasn't it?"

"I think so."

"If the police had kept at her, kept questioning her, it might have been too much. It might have been more than she could stand. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes," I said. "Greta told us about—about her trouble."

"We've got to get her out of this," Whitney said, "and away from it. I've known Greta for a long, long time. Nothing like this should happen to her."

We left Whitney and headed for a restaurant that Jeff fondly remembered from his visits with his aunt.

He might as well have eaten in a drugstore for all the attention he paid to his food; I might as well have been in Providence, Rhode Island, for all the attention he paid me. At last he said, "Haila."

"Here I am, Jeff."

"Tell me about the morning of Hogan's murder again."

"If I do, promise to listen?"

"I'm interested."

"I woke, looked out the window. I saw Greta come aboard. I heard Russell whistling while he shaved, heard Hilda call him. I dressed, went to breakfast. Little Polly found Hogan. Then I went to his room."

"Greta came back to the boat," Jeff said, "and in a matter of minutes Hogan was dead."

"Of course! That's the way the killer planned it. To throw suspicion on Greta."

"But he couldn't have planned it; he didn't know when Greta would be back."

"Jeff," I said, "you're not beginning to think—you don't think that Greta's guilty?"

"No."

"Darling, I think I'll have a brandy. I think I need a brandy."

"Waiter!" Jeff called. "Two brandies."

I lit a cigarette. I was very casual. "Darling," I said, "I don't think I'll stay with the boat."

"I don't blame you," Jeff said.

"I think," I said softly, "I think I'll come back to New York."

I waited. I waited for Jeff's face to light up, for him to reach across the table and take my hand in his and tell me it didn't matter how many terms Grover Cleveland served, that all that mattered was us. I waited in vain.

Jeff said, "Where's that waiter? Is he tramping out the grapes for our brandy?"

There it was; there I had it. It took two to save a marriage. I couldn't do it alone. Fate had dealt me a husband who was totally incapable of feeling any of the finer things in life. It was no use; this was the end.

"Jeff," I said, as soon as I was able to speak, "We must be sensible. We aren't suited to each other. The thing wrong with our marriage is basic. We're poles apart."

"Ah, here's the brandy!"

"We're young. There's still much of our lives that can be salvaged. I'll find another man. But I doubt if you'll ever be able to find another girl who is long-suffering enough to stay with you more than an hour or two at a time."

"I have my work," he said. "I'll lose myself in it."

"Then it's settled. Divorce."

Jeff was unable to speak; his mouth was full of brandy.

"Now, Jeff, about dividing the furniture and things."

"I'd like to have the linen," he said . . . "No, you can have it. Most of it's still at the laundry. I'll take the silver. I suppose you'll want all those wonderful pictures of me."

"I think not, thank you, Jeff. But I'll take the coffee table."

"That old thing?"

"It'll look quite nice without your feet on it."

"Yes, I'll miss that old coffee table."

"Oh, Jeff . . ."

"The hours we sat at it, the evenings."

"Oh, Jeff." I pushed my tears back into their ducts. "Please don't."

"Snow beating against our garden windows, a fire in the fireplace, the two of us talking—talking half the night away."

"Yes . . ."

"Lord Harry, Haila, how you did talk, talk, talk!"

"Me! I seldom opened my mouth except to correct some stupid thing you said!"

"Grover Cleveland did serve two terms," Jeff snarled.

I rose to my feet. "Really, Jeff, I think the next time we see each other it should be in a lawyer's office. Now, if you don't mind, I'll be running along."

Jeff followed me back to the boat. I walked slowly, then more slowly; I stopped, pretending to look into store windows. Somehow Jeff, in his inimitable manner, never managed to catch up to me. I got to my cabin without running into any of the troupe. I turned on the light and saw the mirror.

At first I thought it was blood splattered across the glass. Then I saw that the red splotches were words, scrawled in lipstick. "I know who killed Russell," the words said. Underneath them was the initial "T." Trudi Lang knew who the murderer was.

I shouted for Jeff; in ten seconds he was reading my mirror. He stepped out on deck and he shouted for Trudi. Joe and Ella Pinker came out of their cabins and gaped at him, at his excitement. Little Polly appeared and said that Trudi wasn't on the boat.

"How do you know?" Jeff asked.

"When I was coming home from the drugstore a little while ago I saw her. She didn't see me, but I saw her. She was acting suspicious."

"Polly!" her mother said sharply. "Stop that!"

"I did see her, Mother."

"Tell us what you saw," Jeff said. "Not what you think."

"She was getting into a taxicab."

"Which way did it go?"

"Let me think," Polly said. This was her big moment of importance and she wasn't letting it get away from her too quickly.

"Did it start across the bridge?"

"Yes." Polly's face fell with disappointment. "How did you know?"

Jeff wheeled around and was down the steps to the first deck in what seemed a single leap. He was running down the gangplank before I had started to move. If there had been a cab on the street I never would have caught him. As it was, I arrived at his side just in time to slip into the taxi he had found when he opened its door. He tumbled in after me.

"The Robinson Hotel," he said to the driver.

"Where's that? Never heard of it."

"Across the bridge, I'll show you."

We crossed the bridge and turned a corner, and the dull light of the Robinson Hotel crept out of its door and reached unsuccessfully for the curb of the narrow sidewalk.

I had a head start on Jeff; he had to pay off the cabby. I reached the door to Greta's room and put my hand on its knob. The door was unlocked. I waited then for Jeff. I couldn't be the first to enter that room.

Jeff pushed wide the door. It swung into the darkness and disappeared.

"Greta!" he called. He moved cautiously into the room, across it, and snapped on the bridge lamp. The room was empty.

He opened the door that Greta had hidden behind a few hours ago when she had heard the footsteps climbing the stairs toward her. It opened on a shallow closet. A few newspapers lay on its floor, three empty clothes hangers swung and clinked together on a rod.

"She wouldn't have gone out," I said. "She wouldn't have gone out for anything . . ."

He wasn't listening; he was looking down past my knees at a spot on the floor behind me. He stepped by me as I turned, and I saw how gingerly, his fingers swathed in a handkerchief, he picked up the knife. It was a long, thin-bladed knife with a carved handle. It could have been a trophy of some war, a souvenir, a hunting knife. It could have been the knife that had killed Russell Hogan.

I turned away from it, toward the door, and I kept my face averted when Jeff dropped to one knee beside the bed. He was back on his feet immediately and out into the hall. I followed him as he started his search of the other rooms on that floor.

Earlier in the evening we had found them empty. The first two still were. Jeff preceded me into the third. He turned on the light and instantly, he spun back to stop me at the doorway. It was too late. He reached out his hand and switched off the lamp.

The room was dark again, but I had had time to see what Jeff had tried to prevent my seeing. I had seen the woman's arm stretched out from beneath the narrow, empty bed, the palm of her hand turned upward. I had seen the white, still-terror-wracked face, the blazing copper-colored hair spilling luxuriously across the bare floor. The knife had been used to murder Russell Hogan. It had been used once again to murder Trudi Lang . . .

Jeff came out of the phone booth. He walked quickly to where I was standing by the door of the drugstore. He said, "I got hold of Lambert. He'll be here in a few minutes."

"Trudi," I said, "Russell—now Trudi Lang."

"Don't stay here, Haila. Go back to the boat."

"Jeff, Greta—she didn't—"

"No. Greta had nothing to do with this."

"Trudi knew who it was. Trudi knew the murderer."

"No," Jeff said.

"She must have known, Jeff. She was trying to tell us, and the murderer had to kill her."

"Trudi didn't know, Haila."

"But the message on my mirror?"

"The killer wrote that. To make us think just what you are thinking now—that Trudi was killed because she knew. He wants us to think that that, and nothing else, was the motive for Trudi's death. In that way he can hide the real motive. The motive that would trap him."

"I don't understand, Jeff."

"Russell Hogan would know the motive for Trudi's death."

"But he was killed two days ago."

"Yes. That's why he was killed. Trudi wasn't murdered because she knew who killed Hogan. It's just the reverse. Hogan was killed because he would have known who murdered Trudi."

"Then, all along, Trudi was the prime victim?"

"Yes, and Hogan was secondary. But the killer had to do away with Hogan first—to protect himself."

"Then there *was* no real motive for Russell's death. That's why Greta seemed to be the only one who could . . ."

"Yes. That was all a part of the plan . . . Haila, go back to the boat now. You're in bad shape."

"I think I will, Jeff. I'll wait for you in my cabin."

As we stepped out of the drugstore, we heard the distant whine of a police siren. Jeff hurried away, back to the Robinson Hotel, and I started once more for *The New Sensation*.

A fog had settled down upon the town like a wet, heavy black snow. It was so thick that it stilled the city's noises, and the dull quiet seemed ominous. I stood at a corner, shouting at each creeping shape of a car, waving for a taxi. It was no use; taxi drivers were too smart to be out on a night like this. The streetcar seemed no more than a row of dimly lit windows as it crawled out of the smog, and I found it strangely deserted for ten o'clock at night.

It was hard getting down through the parking lot on the river slope. All the cars' owners seemed to have chosen that moment to leave, and it was all I could do to slip through the moving, honking mass of automobiles.

At first I thought that the boat looked dark because the fog had obscured its lights. But as I drew closer I discovered there was not a light on it; it looked deserted.

Jeff had been right; I was in bad shape. I had difficulty climbing the gangplank. I was so weary that it seemed to me as steep as Jacob's ladder. In my cabin I groped for the string on my light and, not finding it, gave up. My head ached badly. I flopped on the bed, made myself relax. Jeff had things under control, I told myself; Greta was out of it. The killer would soon . . . the pounding of my temples slowly faded . . .

My cabin, when I awoke, was in a darkness so complete that I couldn't even locate the window. I fumbled for the light string and pulled it. Nothing happened. Feeling my way around the walls, I found the door. I pulled it open.

It was only the wet, cold air slapping at my face that assured me I had stepped out onto the deck and not into a closet. The blackness there was as deep and impenetrable as in my room. The thick blanket of fog blotted out the river slope, the red and green lamps of the

overhead railroad, everything. The boat lay in utter silence, save for the angry sound of water rushing below me.

I moved slowly across the deck until I came to the railing, and, turning, I stood with my back against it. At the upstream end of the boat the light from a single window turned a blotch of the blackness into an eerie gray. There was someone on board; someone in the dining-room. I started for the light.

Captain Taggart was sitting alone at the table, a small, white-globed oil lamp before him. I had made no effort to be quiet, but his head didn't turn as I stepped into the dining-room. Even after I spoke his name he made no move. He stared straight before him into the light of the lamp, as he gently rolled a coffee mug back and forth between his hands. There was something in his manner that made me hesitate before I spoke again.

Then I said loudly, "Captain Taggart!"

His head jerked, and when he swung around to me there was a kind of dull surprise in his thin, grayish face. "What are you doin' here?" he demanded.

"I saw your light and—"

"I mean what are you doin' on the boat? You should've got off when they all did."

"I've been asleep," I said. "What is it, Captain? What's the matter?"

"The river's risin' and it's goin' to be quite a flood. By tomorrow it'll be up in the streets." He smiled, pleased beyond all measure. "River might even get into the movin'-picture houses and ruin all them pretty plush seats. But my boat will be ridin' up on top of it."

"The flood," I said quickly to stop his gabbling. There was something hectic about his unexpected garrulousness, and it unnerved me. "Is it the flood that's put out the lights?"

He didn't answer my question; he only kept on talking: "I'm the only one here now. The rest of them run like rabbits, they run to hotels like scared rabbits. This old boat's a pile safer than them lade-da-hotels. And you don't have to tip nobody. If a boat won't sink in ten feet of water, it won't sink in fifty feet."

"But it might break loose," I said. "It might hit a bridge or go over a dam. You'd better not stay here, Captain, really."

"Don't talk like that," he said furiously. "Don't talk nonsense!"

He lifted his coffee cup and drained it. He set it down, and his face was twisted in a grimace. He shuddered, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand; then he was grinning foolishly. At last

I understood the strange behavior of Captain L. L. Taggart.

"Captain," I said, "I thought you disapproved of drinking."

"You tend to your knittin'; I'll tend to mine."

"But this is no time for you to—to get drunk."

"You're wastin' your breath. I am drunk. Back in 1906 I swore off it for forty years. Never touched a drop. I'm seein' now if I was smart. I was. Drinkin' is foolishness. I feel terrible now; I'll feel worse tomorrow. Foolishness . . . Where is Russell Hogan?"

"What—what did you say?"

"Where's Hogan?" The Captain smashed the heavy cup viciously down on the table, splitting one of the pine boards from end to end. "I want to talk to Hogan! Leavin' the boat, is he? Plannin' to go to New York and shoduce some la-de-da play there. Says the browboat is a relic of the past, laughs at my boat, laughs at me. We're relics, are we? Where is Hogan? Send him to me. I'll deal with Mr. Hogan."

"Captain," I said, "Russell Hogan's dead."

"Dead, did you say?"

"Yes."

"A relic of the past, did he say? Hogan is gone and the boat ain't. The boat's still here. I don't believe it. Send Hogan to me."

"Captain, we'd better not stay on board any longer."

"Send Hogan to me!" he thundered. "Send him and Miss Trudi Lang! You hear?"

"Yes, sir."

I backed out of the dining-room onto the deck and, groping along it, counting the doors as I passed them, made my way to my room. I knew that I would brave hell and higher water than Pittsburgh was having than spend one more minute on *The New Sensation*. Captain Taggart was drunk. I found my coat and purse. The rest of my things could float down to the Gulf of Mexico for all I cared. So long as they sailed without me.

I was at the door, when I heard the footsteps sliding cautiously along the deck. I stopped in the open doorway, flattened myself against the jamb. The steps came nearer, came to me, and stopped at my side. I could see nothing at all, but I heard the quick, shallow breathing. I could almost feel it on my face. A hand, groping for the doorknob, found mine. It closed on my arm and tightened. I screamed then.

"Haila!" Whitney Mallon was shaking me gently. "Haila, what's the matter? I thought I heard your voice a moment ago."

"Whitney!" The relief that poured through me left me even weaker than before. "Oh, Whitney, I didn't know it was you!"

He laughed, and his laugh was warm and reassuring. "Who did you think it was?"

"The Captain. He's been drinking and—"

"Yes, I know. It finally got him. But he's upset about his boat, Haila; that's all."

"I wonder if that's all. He talked about Russell as if he hadn't been murdered. He talked about Trudi, too. I didn't tell him about her. I wondered—I wondered if he needed to be told that she was dead, too."

Whitney's hands dropped from my shoulders. His voice sounded choked and far away. "Trudi," he said. "You said that Trudi—"

"Oh, Whitney, I'm sorry. I forgot that you didn't—" I forced myself to go on: "She's dead, Whitney. She was stabbed, like Russell was. Jeff and I found her a little while ago."

"Found her where?"

"At—at Greta's place."

"Greta's place! And—what about Greta?"

"She was gone, Whitney."

I heard him turn and start away from me. Quickly I stretched out my hand and caught his arm. "No, Whitney, there's nothing you can do. You couldn't find her tonight. The police are looking for her. It's going to be all right."

"It's going to be all right," he repeated dully. "How can it be all right?" His voice rose fiercely: "The police can prove that Greta killed Russell! Even Jeff admitted that. And now Trudi's been killed and Greta's gone! Haila, *how* can it be all right? You know Greta's innocent; I know it. But we don't count."

"Whitney, Jeff knows it. He can prove that she's innocent."

"How?" His voice was low and helpless. "Trudi dead in Greta's room. Greta's run away. And Russell. He was killed right after she got back to the boat. Who'll believe that was a coincidence?"

"I don't believe it was a coincidence."

"What?"

"Don't you see, Whitney? Someone is trying to make Greta look guilty. Someone is planning it all. Think about Russell's death for a minute. The killer must have been waiting that morning for Greta to come back. He must have been all ready to murder . . ."

"No. He couldn't have known when she'd come back, or if she'd come back at all. That doesn't make sense."

"He might have killed Russell before she came back," I said. "Maybe . . ."

"Haila," Whitney said, "Russell was still alive when Greta got here. Don't you remember? Hilda saw him."

"Yes," I admitted. "Yes, I heard her knock on his window, I heard her call to him and . . ."

I stopped, my own words turning over and over in my mind: *I heard Hilda knock on his window*. The window had been closed then, old Hilda had rapped sharply, impatiently upon it. I reached out my hand, and it touched the faintly crinkled, mottled glass of the window beside me. It was frosted, just as every window in every cabin on board was. Hilda could have seen a figure behind it, the silhouette of a man standing at a mirror, going through the motions of shaving. She could have seen that, nothing more. She would have taken for granted that it was Russell Hogan in Russell Hogan's room.

I had to fight to keep my voice from squealing with excitement when I spoke. "Whitney," I said, "Hilda couldn't see clearly through that window. It might not have been Russell. It might have been his murderer standing there. Russell might have been already dead . . ."

Whitney said slowly, "But he answered her. When Hilda called to him, Russell answered her."

"No. He didn't speak, he didn't use his voice. He was whistling, and he whistled louder then to show her that he heard. Any man who can whistle through his teeth could have imitated Russell. And name me a man who can't whistle through his teeth! Why, every man I ever knew could . . ."

I pulled in my breath, clamping my teeth down on my words. There was something wrong with what I had said. I knew it then, but then it was too late. Quickly, I slipped my feet out of my shoes. I touched my finger tips lightly to the wall. Using it for guidance, I began inching silently along the deck.

I had been wrong. Not every man could whistle the way Russell Hogan had; not every man on *The New Sensation*. Not Captain Taggart. He couldn't carry a simple tune, he couldn't make anything come out of his calliope but a weird burlesque of a melody. And not Joe Pinker. You can't whistle through your teeth if you have no teeth. There was only one man aboard the showboat who could whistle like Russell Hogan.

There was still no sound from behind me, no footsteps, no rush

of movement. I moved faster. My hand touched the stair rail and I started down the steps.

I had reached the bottom when I heard him above me, coming rapidly toward the stairs and down them. I slid along the deck, breathlessly, on tiptoe, but he had heard me.

Hugging the wall, I crouched low. I felt him as he passed, his groping hand stirred the air above my head. And then he passed, and his steps grew fainter.

Now I dared to take my first breath. Now he was gone; it would take minutes for him to round the whole deck, to return to this spot. In those few minutes I could find the gangplank; I had to find it. I took a step to the right, one to the left, and I stopped. I didn't know on which end of the boat I was.

A minute had passed since his steps had faded down the deck, maybe two. There wouldn't be much longer. I flattened my back against the wall, and then, with my arms outstretched, I moved across the deck until my hands touched the railing. I knelt down, jerked my coat off my shoulders. I slid one leg over the side of the boat. And again I stopped. Which side of the boat was I on?

I was completely lost. I tried to remember my movements after I had come down the stairs. I had gone one way, then another. All sense of direction was gone. Below me the water churned furiously as it rushed past. It would be one thing to swim the few yards to the river bank on which the parking lot lay. But I might be on the other side of the boat. My chances were better against a murderer who had yet to find me than against the impenetrable blackness of a roaring, frenzied river.

I lay still, straining for the sound of a footstep, and there was nothing, nothing that rose above the lashing of the water. If I could scream . . . but my throat was paralyzed and it would be a feeble scream. He would hear it before the Captain did; he would find me first. . .

Tugging my coat around my shoulders, I rose. If I could find the stairway again, if I could reach the Captain before Whitney found me, I would have a chance.

I made no attempt to be quiet now; I stumbled recklessly along the deck, sweeping the air with my hands. And then my fingers closed on a stair rail and I flung myself up the steps.

There was no glow now to mark the dining-room window for me, but the stairs had given me back my direction. I plunged toward

the upstream end of the boat, feeling the doorways as I came to them, counting them. I passed the door to Greta's room, to mine, then the rooms that had been Trudi's and Russell Hogan's. At last I found the wider door that was the dining-room's.

It was dark in there, and deathly still. I inched my way across the floor to where I knew the long, bare table stood. I could sense the figure in the chair, hear the Captain's quiet breathing. I reached out and found his shoulder.

"Captain," I whispered. "Captain Taggart."

From the other side of the room a voice spoke. "I thought this was where you would come," Whitney Mallon said. His voice was soft, with a lilting jeer. "I'm afraid the Captain won't be able to help much. He's had a little accident."

I screamed then and, whirling about, raced from the room. He was right behind me as I ran blindly down the deck. My fingers slapped against the stair rail, but my foot caught on the top step. I felt his hands on my shoulders before I plunged headlong down into the black pit of the stair well. . .

I put a fresh towel on Jeff's forehead, then went on chafing his wrists. He was still unconscious, but color had crept into his face.

The radio in the corner of the hotel room was keeping me posted. The flood waters were still rising, but they were expected to reach their peak before morning. The damage would be serious, but not disastrous. The steady stream of flood reports was interrupted once: Whitney Mallon, director of the showboat company, had been arrested for the murders of Russell Hogan and Trudi Lang.

I had known that Whitney was safely locked up, but it was good to hear it again. Detective Lambert had had time to give me only one more piece of information. Greta had been found wandering the streets of the lower North Side, lost but unharmed. She was tucked now in a good bed three floors below me. I had seen her for a moment, and from her smile I knew that everything would be all right with Greta Cole from now on.

Jeff stirred, and his eyelids fluttered. I chafed his wrists more arduously. His eyes opened, and stayed open. He looked at me, then at the ceiling. He spoke: "What hit me?"

"I did, darling. That is, my body did as it hurtled through space. You caught me. Thank you. You saved me from fracturing about everything I own."

"I feel as if I'd been fractured here and there."

"You have two black eyes."

"Only two?"

"My knee hit you. Oh, you were cute, Jeff. There you were, unconscious, with me clasped in your arms. The cops had to pry your arms away from me."

"What are you doing in a man's hotel room, Haila? You know, we're man and wife in name only. You're divorcing me."

"I think, Jeff, that I like you a lot better when you're unconscious."

Detective Lambert strode into the room. Locking up a murderer had made a new man of him. He looked pleasant; he even smiled fondly at Jeff. "How do you feel, Troy?"

"Like somebody dropped a woman on me."

Lambert sat down and lit a cigarette. "I've just had a long chat with Mallon. You were right about a lot of things, Troy. He had to kill Trudi Lang. But Hogan would have known who had killed her, and why, so he murdered Hogan first. And he was framing Greta Cole to take the rap for him. Then your hunch about the motive was a good one, too."

"The money," Jeff said. He turned to me: "Do you remember telling me about your first dinner on the boat? Trudi was kidding Whitney about some money he owed her?"

"But it was just a few dollars in advance of his salary."

"I wondered if it mightn't be more, and if she wasn't kidding him, but threatening him. And I wondered about Joe Pinker seeing Trudi come out of the courthouse. Maybe she wasn't seeing about a dog license, as she claimed. Maybe she was seeing how you go about getting someone thrown in the clink for not paying you back a lot of money he owes you."

"Correct," Lambert said. "It was forty thousand dollars. Trudi had been threatening Mallon about it for a long time. At last she got really tough. If he didn't ante up in forty-eight hours she was going to prefer charges of grand larceny against him. But he couldn't ante up; he didn't have the money. He had gambled it away. So it was either murder or a long, long prison term for him. But just as you figured, Troy, Hogan knew all about that money. So Mallon had to kill him first to protect himself on Trudi's murder."

"How did Mallon get the money from Trudi in the first place?"

"And where did Trudi pick up forty thousand?" Jeff said.

"It was like this," Lambert said. "Trudi was quite a gal, glamorous and thrifty. She left a trail of ex-husbands from here to Warsaw, via Singapore, and each marriage was a financial success for Trudi."

Then Mallon met her and got his hands into the dough. That guy's a smooth operator. He filled Trudi up with big-time promises of how he could use that money to make a Broadway and Hollywood star out of her. He'd play that forty thousand into a million for Trudi. She fell for it, and for two years he kept her dazzled with what a glorious future he had in store for her. But then she fell in love with Hogan. She told him about her money, and he thought he could do better with it than Whitney Mallon had. The two of them would produce their own play in New York. So Trudi put screws on Mallon, and that's when he had to kill her. Hogan first, then her."

"Yes," Jeff said. "You see, he twisted the necessity of killing Hogan first into a plan. He knew somebody who had good reason to murder Hogan: Greta Cole. So he hired her for the showboat. He played malicious tricks on her, trying to upset her, to make her wonder if she was completely well mentally. It worked. When Hogan was killed, all suspicion fell on Greta. And even Greta wasn't sure she wasn't guilty."

"But, Jeff," I said, "why did he help her escape then?"

"He had to. Remember, he had committed only one murder—and that not the important one. Greta had to be kept at liberty to take the blame for Trudi's murder when it happened. And if Lambert had locked her up—well, that would have eliminated her. Whitney had a bad moment when the police first grabbed Greta. He hadn't expected that; he had thought it would take some time for the connection between her and Hogan to come to light. Instead, Greta told Lambert, herself. But when she was released, Whitney decided to take no more chances. He got her out of the way quick—with Ella Pinker's help. And that, incidentally, explains Joe, why he followed us. He knew Ella was up to something; he thought she was up to it with us. She wouldn't tell him, so he tried to ferret it out himself."

"So Whitney was only waiting to get Greta in the right spot," I said, "and then murder Trudi."

"That's it. He tricked Trudi into visiting Greta, tricked Greta out of her room. He waited there, and murdered Trudi when she came in. Again, it would obviously be Greta who was guilty. . . Am I right, Floyd?"

"Right, Jeff," Lambert said.

"Mr. Lambert," I said, "did Jeff really figure out that Mallon was the murderer?"

"Yes, he did."

"And," I said to Jeff, "I suppose it was really quite simple for you."

"Haila, if you knew as much about the theater as I do, you could have figured it out. Actors don't shave in the morning except on matinee days. That wasn't Hogan shaving."

"I figured that out!"

"You see, if Greta wasn't guilty, it was too much of a coincidence that he was killed immediately after she returned to the boat. I figured that Mallon had taken for granted that Greta was there, in her cabin. He killed Hogan, then saw Greta come on board. He knew that Hilda would appear any moment; he had to make it look as though Hogan was still alive. So he impersonated him and easily fooled Hilda. Then he lathered Hogan's face and shaved half of it."

"How did you narrow it down to Whitney being the impersonator? Was it the whistling?"

"Yes. The Captain can't carry a tune, Pinker has no teeth to whistle through. That left Mallon. But I was stopped right there. I couldn't find any reason for him to have murdered Hogan. He had no reason to murder anyone—except possibly Trudi Lang. But she hadn't been killed; Hogan had. It wasn't until we found Trudi that my theory made any sense. Mallon had committed his murders backwards."

"Well," Lambert said, "your theory turned out to be right." He got to his feet. "Thanks, Jeff, for all the help. I'll leave you two lovebirds together now. Good night."

We sat in silence for a long time after the detective had gone. If ever there was a moment for a husband to tell his wife he adored her, this was it. Now, with the murder solved, there was nothing in that room but Jeff and me and our problem. The silence grew thicker and thicker.

"Haila," Jeff said, "maybe you were thinking of Benjamin Harrison."

"Benjamin Harrison! Of course! Of course, I was! You see, we were both right! Jeff . . ."

"Yes?"

"Jeff, if you had known it was I falling down those stairs, would you have caught me?"

"I knew it was you, Haila."

"Darling, you do love me!"

He put his arm around me. "When a girl comes falling down a flight of stairs," he said, "it's you, sweetheart, only you."

a **NEW** short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

first publication in the United States

The story of what happened to Arthur Vincent-Holmes of the British Foreign Service, Great Britain's representative to the International Refugee Conference in Switzerland. "In Geneva things went from bad to worse." But that was only the beginning of Arthur Vincent-Holmes' troubles . . .

A MAN WITHOUT PAPERS

by **PATRICIA MOYES**

If Arthur Vincent-Holmes had not been in a thoroughly bad temper that day it would probably never have happened. As it was, everything had conspired to irritate and upset him.

For a start, he had not wanted to come to Geneva at all. He and his wife had been invited to spend a week at Lord Strathsporrans' place in the Highlands, where Arthur looked forward with keen anticipation to slaughtering a large number of small birds with very little effort, since they were driven relentlessly over the barrel of his gun by an army of beaters. There would have been good food and drink, and plenty of the noncontroversial conversation which was one of Arthur's greatest pleasures. As a professional debater, he found it a joyful relaxation to propound his favorite theories to a select audience of people who agreed passionately—and preferably inarticulately—with every word he said.

Not that he was incapable of dealing with opposition—far from it; but opposition imposed a degree of forethought on his utterances which he found irksome. Secure in the approval of his listeners, his

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opinions flowed out easily in beautifully constructed cadences, nicely tempered with wit. He had already formulated in his mind several epigrams on the African situation, the problem of Pakistan, and the weaknesses of Soviet economy—epigrams which he realized (for he was not a stupid man) would be tricky to defend against informed disagreement. At Strathsporrán Castle, however, he could have whipped them out, one after the other, to gratifying bursts of applause and laughter, thereby enhancing his reputation as a diplomat who combined wit with common sense.

All these delights, at the last moment, were denied him. Sir Sidney Parkington, his immediate chief and delegate-elect to the International Refugee Conference, had succumbed with inconsiderate lack of notice to an acute attack of peritonitis, and in consequence Arthur found himself, wifeless and disgruntled, condemned to three days of discussions in the beige marble desert of the Palais des Nations.

His terms of reference, too, offended him—even though he privately agreed wholeheartedly with the opinions he was to express. Nevertheless, to sympathize profoundly with the plight of refugees, while at the same time strictly refusing to increase aid or enlarge the quota to be admitted to Great Britain, would certainly lay him open to easy sniping both from sentimental do-gooders and practical Trade Unionists. He was already bad-tempered when he boarded the plane at London Airport.

In Geneva things went from bad to worse. His favorite lakeside hotel had been unable to give him a room, since its entire accommodations had been commandeered by an Arab Sheik and his retinue of wives. Arthur, his neat gray mustache bristling with distinguished indignation, found himself booked into an inferior hotel and allotted a small room overlooking a courtyard. On this score he had given hell to his Personal Assistant, a mild, fair-haired young man named Pratt who wore rimless glasses and whom Arthur suspected of left-wing leanings.

To crown it all there had been an unpleasant moment during the first morning's session of the conference, when the Indian delegate had interrupted Arthur's speech to inquire courteously whether the representative of Great Britain had ever actually seen a refugee. Arthur, who had not, was understandably angry at the irrelevance of the question. Unfortunately, there had been some laughter. Arthur left the Palais des Nations in a far from rosy frame of mind.

There was no meeting in the afternoon, so Arthur drove moodily

back to his hotel. As always when attending a conference abroad, he had dismissed his official chauffeur and hired a self-drive car. Here again he had been frustrated, for the wretched Pratt—with mumbled excuses about the tourist season—had produced for him a small gray Volkswagen, the exact replica of a thousand others in the city and hardly a vehicle to boost the ego.

All the same, it was a car and it moved with pleasant liveliness. As Arthur sped along the lakeside road, he became aware of the glory of the autumn sunshine, of white sails scudding on blue water, of the icy majesty of Mont Blanc, clear-cut against a cloudless sky. He made a sudden decision. He would salve his ragged discontent by driving into France and spending the night at Chamonix. There would be plenty of time to get back by eleven o'clock in the morning, when the conference reopened. And, Arthur reflected with grim satisfaction, he would telephone Pratt and instruct him to find a decent room in a respectable hotel by tomorrow. What if they were all full? That would be Pratt's worry. Arthur felt better already, thinking about Pratt's discomfiture.

At the hotel he quickly packed his case, checked out, stowed his passport and documents neatly in the glove compartment, ready for the frontier, and took the road in a much gayer mood. On the Route de Chêne he remembered the exorbitant price of English cigarettes in France and stopped to buy a carton. By the time he reached the frontier he was humming the Prize Song from the Meistersinger under his breath.

The Swiss frontier guard waved him past, and a few yards farther on, a French *douanier* came yawning out of his little hut.

"Your passport and green insurance card, please, Monsieur."

"*Volontiers, Monsieur.*" Arthur spoke good French and enjoyed airing it. He opened the glove compartment. Inside were a sticky packet of very old toffee, one beige string glove, a tattered map of Spain, and a small flashlight. Nothing else.

For a moment Arthur was overcome by a sense of utter unreality. Such things did not happen. He unfolded the map of Spain in a sort of despairing hope that his documents might be lurking inside it. A small amount of pipe tobacco fell out on his knees. The *douanier* waited patiently, with a slight smile.

After a seeming eternity Arthur said, "I'm sorry. There seems to be some mistake."

"Indeed, Monsieur?" The smile had begun to fade.

Arthur got out of the car, walked to the front, and lifted the hood.

Instead of his suitcase he found himself looking at an old gray blanket and a bag containing snow chains. It was only then that he realized what had happened. He remembered vaguely that there had been another gray Volkswagen parked outside the tobacconist's shop. He had foolishly left his key in the ignition while he went into the shop. The other driver had evidently done the same. And Arthur had taken the wrong car.

Panic surged up in him, but he quashed it at once. He managed to give the *douanier* a charmingly assured smile. "I am very sorry, Monsieur," he said smoothly. "I have stupidly left my documents at home. I will return for them."

The Frenchman—a big, dark, burly fellow—was looking considerably less friendly now, but Arthur did not intend to stay long enough to let his doubts formulate. Surely his own car would still be there on the Route de Chêne. The thing was to get back to it as soon as possible. He swung the car into a rapid reverse, and headed back toward Geneva. It was then that two fair-haired, grim-faced officers came out of the Swiss frontier post and planted themselves squarely in his path. One of them was a gendarme, and he was fingering his revolver. Arthur stopped.

The taller of the two men approached the car. He said, with an edge to his voice that Arthur did not like, "Your documents, please, Monsieur."

"I'm terribly sorry, officer." Arthur tried to keep the reassuring smile on his face, but he could feel it stiffening under the strain. "There has been a foolish mistake. I have left my documents at home."

"There has certainly been a mistake," said the gendarme, far from pleasantly. "Will you be kind enough to step inside?" He had already opened the door of the car in a marked manner. Arthur stepped inside.

The Swiss customs post was concrete and cheerless. Arthur followed the gendarme into an inner office, which was bleakly furnished with a cupboard, a desk, and two chairs. The gendarme sat down at the desk.

"So you have no documents, Monsieur? That is strange. May I ask whether this is in fact your car?"

Arthur hesitated. Bereft of his diplomatic passport, he felt naked. "I can explain—" he began.

"Is it your car, or isn't it?"

"Well—no. Not exactly."

"The car you are driving," pursued the gendarme, without emotion, "has just been reported by telephone as having been stolen." He made a note in a large dossier. "You understand that we shall have to detain you while inquiries are made."

Arthur made an effort to grasp the retreating coattails of reality.

"My good man," he said, "this is ridiculous. Do you know to whom you are talking?"

"No," said the gendarme reasonably. "Since you have no papers of any sort, it is impossible for us to establish your identity."

"I am Arthur Vincent-Holmes, British delegate to the International Refugee Conference."

"That, Monsieur, remains to be seen. Whoever you are, you have yet to explain how you came to be driving a stolen car, and why you attempted to cross the frontier in it."

"It was a mistake," said Arthur. He heard his own voice rising slightly, and made an effort to control it. "I took it by mistake."

"Indeed?"

"I have a car exactly like this one. They were both parked on the Route de Chêne. I took the wrong car."

The gendarme took a long cynical pull on his Gauloise, and then stubbed it out very deliberately in the tin ashtray.

"Whereabouts on the Route de Chêne?"

"I don't know. Outside a tobacconist's shop."

The gendarme's blue eyes glinted keenly. "And you drove all this way in a car which was not yours, without noticing the difference?"

"The other car isn't mine either," said Arthur, anger getting the better of his fright.

"Really? This becomes more and more interesting."

"I mean, I had hired it. I had never driven it until today. It looks exactly like this one."

"Which firm did you hire it from?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"It was arranged for me by the secretariat here."

"I see." The gendarme paused, then said with the speed of a bullet, "Why did you tell us that you had left your documents at home?"

"I . . . it seemed too complicated to explain. I just wanted to go back and find my own car."

There was a short silence. Then the gendarme said, "I am sorry, Monsieur. I have heard this sort of story too often to find it convincing."

"How dare you speak to me like that!" Arthur's indignation bubbled like *fondue*. "I tell you, I am Arthur Vincent-Holmes of the British Foreign Service, and I demand to be released immediately!"

"And yet you have no papers of identification?"

"How could I have any? They're all in the car."

"Not a letter, a driving license, anything?"

Furiously Arthur searched his pockets. His wallet, which was made of the finest crocodile skin, contained 200 Swiss francs, 20 English pounds, and the stubs of two London theater tickets. Other pockets disgorged a spotless white linen handkerchief, an expensive fountain pen, and a key ring. The gendarme picked up the theater tickets and regarded them suspiciously.

"What are these?"

"Counterfoils of two tickets for the Lyric Theatre in London."

"And what is that supposed to prove?"

"At least it shows I was in London last week."

"Very interesting. We are on the track of a gang of car thieves who operate internationally."

"I demand," said Arthur, feeling like a quotation from a phrase book, "that you telephone the British Consul immediately."

The gendarme sighed, a little wearily. "You are evidently not acquainted with Swiss law, Monsieur. You have been apprehended under suspicion of having committed a crime. In these circumstances we have the right to hold you incommunicado until we have completed our inquiries."

"Are you trying to tell me that I am under arrest?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"But I hold a diplomatic passport!"

The gendarme shrugged. "Where is it?"

"In my car."

"So you say. I am sorry, Monsieur. My duty is clear. A man without papers is automatically suspect these days. A man attempting to cross a frontier without papers is even more suspect. And a man attempting to do so in a stolen car—"

"I did not steal it!"

"However, Monsieur, we will be fair. We will check on your story. What is the registration number of your car?"

"I don't know."

"You don't?"

"I only hired it this morning. I didn't even look at the number."

"And you are staying at which hotel in Geneva?"

"The Hotel des Quais."

"Why were you going to France?"

"To spend the night at Chamonix."

"In which hotel?"

"I don't know. I hadn't booked."

"You were planning to return to Geneva tomorrow?"

"Of course. For the Conference."

"I see. Wait there."

The gendarme got up and walked out, shutting the door carefully behind him. Arthur heard the key turning in the lock. In a fury he jumped up and tried the handle. Suddenly the locked door brought home to him the full realization of his position. He, Arthur Vincent-Holmes, O.B.E., was under arrest, locked up like a criminal in a bare room in a foreign frontier post, with a charge of thieving hanging over his head, and no way of proving his identity. No comfortable diplomatic passport to open every door with smiles. No Personal Assistant to smooth the way ahead of him. Furiously he kicked the door and shouted, "You've got to believe me! D'you hear, damn you! You've got to believe me!"

His voice echoed round the little room and died away into silence. Arthur sat down and buried his face in his hands.

After what seemed an eternity, the key turned in the lock again, and the gendarme came in.

"I have telephoned the Hotel des Quais," he said. "It is true that a Monsieur Vincent -Holmes stayed there last night, but he checked out today, saying that he was returning to London."

Miserably Arthur nodded. In his anguish he had forgotten that, not wishing to make an unpleasant scene at the hotel by complaining, he had indeed said just that.

"I . . . I was intending to go to a different hotel when I came back to Geneva."

"Why?"

"Because I was not satisfied with my room."

The gendarme smiled grimly. "To proceed," he said. "You maintain that you left your car in the Route de Chêne?"

"I swear I did."

"It was a gray Volkswagen?"

"Yes. All my documents are in the glove compartment, and there is a pigskin suitcase with my initials on it in gold under the bonnet."

"That is strange. A patrol car has searched the Route de Chêne and there is no sign of any such car." The gendarme looked at Arthur

with something very like pity. "I fear, Monsieur, that I cannot believe a word of your story. The police van will be here in a few minutes. You may smoke a cigarette if you wish."

He pulled a large document toward him and began filling in the spaces that checkered it like missing teeth. Arthur watched him in fascinated misery. *Name: allegedly Arthur Vincent-Holmes. Nationality: allegedly British. Occupation: allegedly Diplomat.* The gendarme paused, then wrote in the margin in capital letters: NO PAPERS.

It all ended happily, of course. Some two hours later the police found Arthur's hired car, which had been driven off by a gang of youths, who soon abandoned it in a side street. The pigskin case was missing, but the documents were there. Arthur was allowed to telephone to Pratt, who arrived to collect his chief from the police station.

The sight of Arthur's diplomatic passport brought about an abrupt change of attitude in the *Gendarmerie*. They begged his pardon with gratifying humility, and pointed out that they had only been doing their duty.

As Arthur and Pratt were leaving, the gendarme who had effected the arrest followed them to the door. Diffidently he dug a hand into the pocket of his pale blue uniform, and produced a five-franc piece.

"I would like to give this to your Refugee Fund, Monsieur," he said. "You are doing fine work, you and your conference. I am not a rich man—who is, these days? But still I wish to do what I can for . . . for the people without papers."

Arthur, who thought he detected a quick look of understanding passing between Pratt and the gendarme, accepted the money with a bad grace. He felt that they were both somehow laughing at him behind his back, gloating over his recent humiliation. He was also very angry at the loss of his suitcase, which had cost him a great deal of money.

The next day, at the Conference, Arthur spoke with great force and fluency. He roundly condemned the woolly thinking of those who imagined that the refugee problem could be solved by opening all frontiers to the stateless, the dispossessed, the unemployable. What was needed, he argued, was an unsentimental, constructive approach. He cleverly avoided specifying just what this approach should be. He sat down amid warm applause.

When the session was over, he walked with Pratt along the splendid marble gallery of the Palais, with its plate-glass windows overlooking the tranquil lake. Arthur felt the satisfaction of a job well done. Single-handed, he had swayed the French and American delegations to the point where it was virtually certain that they would vote with him tomorrow.

There were other causes for satisfaction, too. Pratt, after a lot of string pulling, had managed to get him a room with a balcony at the Hotel des Bergues, and to exchange the Volkswagen for a large Cadillac. Tomorrow evening he would be back in London, and his wife had written that Charlie Strathsporrان would be heartbroken if he did not join the house party for the weekend.

Pratt's quiet voice beside him said, "There's a collecting box just here, sir."

"A what?"

"A collecting box. For the Refugee Fund. I thought I'd remind you. That five francs."

"Oh, yes." Arthur was momentarily irritated by the reminder of an unpleasant incident. Then he began to think how he would spin it into a good story for the entertainment of Strathsporrان's house guests. How amusing it would be to debunk the vaunted efficiency of the Swiss. And the gendarme's five-franc piece was a pleasantly human touch to end on. Verging on the sentimental, but legitimately so. A very good story.

He took the money out of his pocket and, on impulse, added ten francs from his own wallet.

"It is only fair," he said, "to give these unfortunate people some of my money as well as most of my time."

Pratt did not answer. He appeared not to have heard. He was studying a photograph, displayed beside the collecting box, showing refugees queuing up at some unspecified frontier, waiting for visas.

Arthur cleared his throat. "Well, Pratt, I'll say goodbye for now. See you tomorrow."

"Goodbye, sir," said Pratt politely.

Arthur walked down the corridor to the elevator. In his breast pocket he could feel the hard, reassuring outline of his diplomatic passport, which he now carried everywhere with him, just in case.

"Q"

a **NEW Captain Leopold** story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

One of Captain Leopold's most intriguing cases—Leopold versus a mastermind, a cool and audacious adversary who openly admits that just as the Captain is employed to solve crimes, he is employed to invent them. "We are two sides of the same coin—the puzzle maker and the puzzle solver." The duel between Captain Leopold and a modern Professor Moriarty makes for a baffling thriller . . .

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN ALIVE

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

Abby Tenyon was having a nightmare. She was struggling against the softness of the sheets, fighting to come awake, while a masked man was beating her about the face with a huge padded fist. She could feel the blows, feel the jarring pain as they landed, and she tried to cry out. She wondered what had happened to Ron who had always rescued her in the past.

Then a final blow landed and she stopped caring, drifting back into the sleep that was deeper than sleep, the land that was almost beyond recall. She remembered wondering if she was dying, if this was what that final mystery was all about.

Presently she came awake, aware without opening her eyes that it was daylight. She stirred in the bed and felt a great throbbing pain centered about her face and head. She touched her cheek, winced, and immediately withdrew her hand. She tried to open her left eye and found that she couldn't.

What was wrong with her?

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Opening her right eye with difficulty she could make out her husband still asleep in the other bed. "Ron," she called out. "Ron!"

He stirred but didn't wake up. The digital clock between the beds showed 8:14. He'd never slept this late since the campaign began.

"Ron!" she called louder, trying to move, trying to reach him across the gulf between the beds. Something was terribly wrong with her.

He came awake slowly, his eyes opening and then widening as he saw her. He sat up suddenly in the bed. "My God, Abby! Your face!"

"I . . . I've been hurt, Ron. Something hurt me terribly."

"Abby!" He was out of the bed, holding her.

"I dreamed a man was beating me."

Ron Tenyon reached for the telephone.

Ordinarily the case would have been handled by one of Captain Leopold's staff—Fletcher, perhaps, or more likely Connie Trent. But Ron Tenyon was three days away from the special election for Congress, and that added an important aspect to whatever misadventure had befallen his wife Abby.

Leopold arrived at the hotel room shortly after nine o'clock, having been summoned a half hour earlier by a call from Connie, who'd taken the original report. He found the house physician just finishing his ministrations to Ron Tenyon's wife, who nestled like an ill child in one of the wide twin beds of the room.

"Whatever happened to her has been very upsetting," the doctor said as he headed for the door. "I've given her a tranquilizer. She'll be relaxed and she may doze off."

"What was it, doctor?" Leopold asked.

"She's been beaten about the face. She has two black eyes and some bruises and swelling. But nothing that won't go away in a few weeks' time." He spoke in a calm, low voice as if he'd seen it all before.

"Did she say who did it?"

Ron Tenyon interrupted with the answer. "A masked man with a big padded fist. She thought it was a dream."

"She didn't cry out? You heard nothing?"

"Not a thing," Tenyon admitted. "And I don't usually sleep that heavily."

Leopold nodded to the doctor, indicating he had no further need of him at the moment. Then he sat down on the bed opposite Mrs. Tenyon. The room was large and tastefully furnished, with a view overlooking the river. It was the city's best hotel, the sort a man

like Tenyon would choose for his campaign stop. Leopold knew little about him, except what the papers had printed. He was a thirty-nine-year-old financial expert who'd parlayed a successful business career and an attractive wife into a try at the United States Congress in a special election called because of the incumbent's death.

But right now Abby Tenyon wasn't looking very attractive. She sat propped up in bed, swaddled in blankets, her battered face only just beginning to show the swelling and discoloration that the bruises had caused. "Can you tell me what happened?" Leopold asked.

"N—no, I'm afraid I can't." She had to speak out of the side of her mouth, and it added to her bizarre, trampled-upon look.

"She thought it was a dream," her husband explained. "A nightmare. She wasn't fully conscious."

"Not even while you were being beaten?" Leopold found that difficult to understand.

"I think we were both drugged," Ron Tenyon said. "I didn't hear a thing, and I slept later than usual this morning. After last night's speech we came back here and ordered room service. I think the food was drugged."

Leopold made some notes. "Was anything stolen from the room?"

"No."

"Was Mrs. Tenyon sexually molested?"

"No."

"You're claiming that the two of you were drugged simply to allow your wife to be beaten up like this?"

"That appears to be the case."

"Do you have any enemies who might have done such a thing?"

"In politics everyone makes enemies. But I can't think of anyone perverse enough to attack me through Abby."

"And you, Mrs. Tenyon?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I don't know anything. This whole thing is a nightmare." The swelling had almost closed both her eyes, and she searched in her purse for some dark glasses to cover them.

"This is the last weekend before the special election," Tenyon pointed out. "Abby was scheduled to make several public appearances with me. Do you think the beating could be linked to that in some manner?"

"I don't know," Leopold said. "Mrs. Tenyon, suppose you tell me everything you can about this dream of the man beating you."

He listened as she spoke, making notes, nodding from time to time. "The huge padded fist would have been a boxing glove. They wanted to mark you but not seriously injure you."

"But why?"

"And why go to the trouble of drugging us and sneaking into our hotel room?" Tenyon wondered. "They could have assaulted her on the street a lot easier."

Leopold considered that. "They may have chosen this method because no one would believe it."

"What do you mean?"

"Weren't you aware of the house physician's blasé attitude? It was nothing new or strange to him. He viewed it as a simple wife-beating."

"You mean—"

"A large segment of the public is going to think you beat your wife, Mr. Tenyon, and that the two of you made up this story of a masked intruder and drugged food because the election is so close."

Ron Tenyon began to pace the floor, his indignation growing. "My opponent would never do a thing like that. Crystal is an honorable man."

"It wouldn't have to be Crystal. Some of his supporters could be acting without his knowledge."

"Then at all costs we must keep this story out of the papers."

"That may be difficult."

"We'll say she has the flu."

But even as he spoke the phone between the beds rang. He answered it and spoke quickly with growing indignation. When he finally hung up his face was tense. "That was my campaign manager. The reporters are already onto it. They've been calling him for the story."

"Someone tipped them off," Leopold suggested.

"It seems so," Tenyon agreed. "The man who beat her up."

"Or perhaps a hotel employee. Maybe even the doctor."

"Well, there's no keeping it secret now."

And there wasn't. It was front-page news on Sunday morning.

Two days later Ron Tenyon lost the special Congressional election by about 1100 votes.

On the morning after the election Leopold called Lieutenant Fletcher into his office. "Get us a couple cups of coffee from the machine," he suggested. "I want to talk."

"About that Tenyon thing, Captain?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"He lost the election."

Leopold nodded. "Eleven hundred votes. If five hundred and fifty or so people changed their minds he would have won."

"You think the bad publicity influenced the election?"

"Yes, I do. And since when is it bad publicity when a man's wife gets beaten up in a hotel room? Why is the press and public so quick to disbelieve his story, and his wife's story?"

"The room was locked, Captain. The idea of somebody drugging them both and getting past those locks, and then not even stealing anything, is just too far-fetched."

"Of course it's far-fetched! The person who did it deliberately made it seem far-fetched so the public would think Tenyon was a wife beater."

"You think George Crystal was involved?" Fletcher asked, stirring some sugar into his coffee.

"He seems decent enough. But there were other interests at work. It was well known that Tenyon opposed casino gambling in the state while Crystal supports it. The gambling interests are working hard to pass that bill, and they wanted Tenyon defeated. Of course, a Congressman doesn't vote directly on state measures, but his influence carries a lot of weight. That's especially true of Tenyon, who'd promised to stump the state in opposition to the casino bill if he was elected to Congress."

"So the casino people hired someone to do the job? They could get a hit man from organized crime easily enough."

"Yes," Leopold agreed, sipping his coffee. "But this whole thing is a bit too subtle for organized crime. They'd be more likely to run Tenyon's car off the road and make a sure thing of it. The idea of drugging them both, breaking into the hotel room, and beating his wife, then leaking the story to the papers, is an almost baroque scheme. Mobsters don't think in those terms."

"Are you giving me the case, Captain?" Fletcher asked.

"Nose around and see what you can find out."

"Any suggestions?" He knew Leopold always had suggestions.

"The hotel. If they were drugged, it was in the food that room service delivered. And if the room was entered in the night it had to be by someone who had a key and knew how to get past the night bolt. Run a check on any ex-convicts who might be employed there."

"I'll get right on it," Fletcher said.

Sometimes in an investigation the police get lucky. Fletcher got lucky on the Tenyon case. By the end of the week he'd discovered that a man named Carl Forsyth, employed in the hotel kitchen, had a record of two convictions—for breaking and entering and simple assault.

Then Fletcher got lucky a second time. As he approached Forsyth in the hallway of his apartment building on a cool May evening, identifying himself as a police officer, the burly man reacted instinctively. He drew a small automatic pistol from an inside pocket and pointed it at Fletcher's chest, squeezing the trigger as Fletcher went for his own weapon. The pistol jammed, and Fletcher smashed the barrel of his revolver down on the man's gun hand before he could try again.

Later, in the interrogation room at headquarters, Leopold faced the man. "You're a two-time loser, Carl. Assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder, resisting arrest—any way you look at it, you're going back to prison for a good long stay."

"I thought he was a mugger," Forsyth insisted. He held up his bandaged hand. "Hell, I try to defend myself and I get a broken hand!"

"Who paid you to drug the Tenyons' food and beat her up?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Come on, Carl. You work in the kitchen. Someone tampered with their food and we think it was you. After they were drugged you picked the lock, or used a passkey. Once inside the room you put on a mask and a boxing glove and punched Abby Tenyon about the face. Then you or someone else phoned the papers, trying to make it look as if Tenyon beat his wife and the story she gave was a coverup."

"You know a lot, don't you?"

"Who hired you, Carl? All we want is the name."

"I'm not saying a word till my lawyer gets here."

And so they waited.

Carl Forsyth's lawyer proved to be Samuel Judge. He was well known in local legal circles, and every time his name was mentioned as a possibility for a judgeship the newsmen had a field day speculating about "Judge Judge." But so far he'd been passed over by the governor—possibly because of his eagerness to defend even the most disreputable criminals, or possibly because he so often got them off. His specialty was plea bargaining, that oddity of the modern legal system, and he was not a welcome figure around head-

quarters. Too many of the men felt the way Leopold did—that weeks of work in building a case should not be bargained away so easily by the District Attorney's office.

But Samuel Judge it was, and he emerged from a meeting with his client to confront a testy Captain Leopold. "When are you going to release him, Captain? You don't have a case."

"Don't I?" Leopold stormed. "He fired a pistol point-blank at Fletcher!"

"The pistol didn't fire," the lawyer replied quietly.

"It would have!"

"That's a matter of conjecture. My client drew a pistol when he was suddenly accosted in a hallway. He immediately surrendered it when Fletcher identified himself."

"Cut out the bull! The gun's not licensed and Forsyth is on parole. That alone is enough to put him back behind bars."

The lawyer thought about it, weighing the possibilities. "What do you want?" he asked at last.

"You plea bargain with the District Attorney's office, not with me."

"Look, your man Fletcher is the one pressing the gun charge."

"The attempted murder charge," Leopold corrected.

"You're onto this Tenyon thing, aren't you?"

"We want him for that. And we want the name of the person who hired him."

Samuel Judge shook his head. "Impossible. My client is too frightened to talk. That's why he drew on Fletcher so fast. He's been afraid of being silenced ever since the Tenyon thing."

"That's his problem."

"He could never testify in court. All the witness-protection programs in the world wouldn't protect him."

"Suppose," Leopold said, speaking slowly, "he didn't have to testify. Suppose he just wrote the name on a piece of paper and we took it from there. It would all be off the record."

Judge considered that. He stood up and began to pace. "I don't think he'd go for that. What would he get in return?"

"Fletcher might forget what happened in that hallway."

"And the Tenyon thing?"

Leopold shook his head. "No, he'd have to be charged with that."

"No deal."

"Why not ask him? The gun charge is more serious. That could put him away for life, with his record."

Judge shrugged and went back to speak with his client. Leopold had gone through this sort of thing before and he knew it would be a long session. It was.

Two hours later Samuel Judge took a folded piece of paper from his vest pocket and slid it across the table to Leopold. "That's all you get," he said. "I didn't even look at it myself. If you bring it into court I'll deny my client ever wrote it."

Leopold unfolded the paper and read the name that was neatly written on it.

Jules Dermain, with a New York City address.

"All right," Leopold turned to Fletcher. "Is this deal agreeable with you?"

"Sure. What the hell, the gun didn't fire."

"Good. Book Forsyth for the Tenyon thing and we'll forget the other." He turned back to the lawyer. "You'll plead him guilty to our charges?"

"I'll plead him guilty to something. That's for me to work out with the D.A."

"Still the plea bargainer! You amaze me, Judge."

"Just looking after my client's interests. Whose interests do you look after, Captain?"

"The victim's."

It took Leopold and Fletcher the better part of two weeks to assemble a file on Mr. Jules Dermain of New York City. When they'd completed their task, Leopold looked over the typewritten sheets and wondered just what it was they had.

Jules Dermain was 63 years old, a native of France who'd come to America after World War II and achieved a somewhat surprising success as a creator and manufacturer of games and puzzles. One of them, *Melrose*, had captured the public fancy in the mid-1960s and made Dermain a millionaire. As far as could be determined the man had no link with organized crime, and he certainly didn't need the money.

Had Forsyth lied to them?

That was what Leopold intended to find out.

New York was familiar territory to him. He'd spent his first years as a police officer and detective there, before returning home. He knew Manhattan especially well, and the little East Side neighborhoods like Gramercy Park brought back fond memories of younger days. Stuyvesant Park was one of these, a few blocks south

of Gramercy. It was surrounded by brownstone townhouses dating back to the mid-19th century, and it was in one of these that Jules Dermain resided.

Dermain saw Leopold in an upstairs office lined with books and samples of the games he'd manufactured. There were a dozen different versions of *Melrose* alone, including foreign language and Braille editions and even a magnetized game to play while traveling. Dermain was slender and white-haired, with the appearance of a professor. A tiny smile played about his lips as he spoke, but his eyes seemed always alert and serious.

"What can I do for you, Captain Leopold? As I understand it, you're not connected with the New York Police Department?"

"That's correct. I spent some years in New York, but at present I'm up in Connecticut. I'm head of our Violent Crimes Squad, and I'm down here investigating a recent crime." Briefly he outlined the circumstances of Abby Tenyon's mysterious beating, omitting the fact that Carl Forsyth was in custody and had supplied Jules Dermain's name.

The Frenchman listened to all this with the slight smile still on his lips, as if awaiting the punch line of a lengthy shaggy-dog story. When Leopold finished he asked, "But how could this possibly concern me? I have never heard of Mr. Ron Tenyon or his wife Abby."

"You must understand that I'm here unofficially, Mr. Dermain. But your name has been mentioned in the course of the investigation. I felt a personal interview with you might be the best way to clear the air."

"So? My name has been mentioned. By whom, may I ask?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

Dermain leaned back in his chair, unconcerned. "Oh, I suppose it was that fool who was hired to do the job."

Leopold sat as if stunned by an ax. He would have been less startled if the Frenchman had drawn a pistol from his desk drawer and started shooting. "You're admitting it?"

"Why not? You're here unofficially, out of your jurisdiction. You have not advised me of my rights or given me a chance to call a lawyer. Nothing I tell you could be used against me."

Leopold began to think it had been a mistake to visit this man. But now that he was here he had to make the best of it. "You admit you hired Carl Forsyth to drug Abby Tenyon and her husband, enter their hotel room and beat her up?"

"Of course! You wouldn't be here if you didn't know that much

already. You must realize that I offer a service, Captain Leopold. Just as you are employed to solve crimes, I am sometimes employed to invent them. We are two sides of the same coin—the puzzle maker and the puzzle solver. As a matter of fact I take some pleasure in meeting you like this. Just as an author sometimes enjoys meeting his readers, I enjoy meeting one of those who is called upon to solve my little plots. You are the first, I must tell you, who has ever come this far.”

“Who hired you to construct this particular puzzle?”

He shrugged. “The casino interests in your state. Their names are unimportant. I was presented with a challenge—to be certain that Ron Tenyon lost the election. Anything short of murder was allowed. Of course I considered the usual blind items planted in the newspapers, but the voting public becomes more sophisticated each year. The little game I devised was designed for indirection. The press would report the facts, and I would leave it to the public to draw a conclusion. I learned their schedule in advance and found that there was a man available who was employed at one of the hotels. In the kitchen, no less! And he was also an expert on locks.

“The pieces almost came together by themselves. He drugged their food, obtained a passkey, tampered with the night bolt in advance, and entered while they slept. Tenyon’s wife was beaten enough to mark her face, but not to do permanent injury. I assumed, correctly I think, that a certain number of people reading that story on the weekend before the special election would be skeptical enough to believe the man beat his wife. It was a close election. I didn’t need to change many minds.”

Leopold had sat in the company of thieves and murderers on many occasions, but nothing had prepared him for this. The man across the desk was bragging of his crime, spreading the details for Leopold’s admiration. “I’m speechless at your audacity,” he admitted. “We’ll see what you have to say in court when Carl Forsyth testifies against you.”

The amused smile remained. “Oh, he wouldn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“I have a certain reputation in underworld circles. Even in prison Mr. Forsyth would not feel entirely safe. The reputation is unearned, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Still, the plotting of a perfect murder is even more of a challenge than a game like the Tenyon affair. Many years ago, when I first

came to this country, I was offered an assignment which might amuse you. There was a certain wealthy man, hunted by many nations, who took refuge in Ireland, buying a large country manor house and surrounding it with an exasperating maze made of brick walls overgrown with dense hedges." As he spoke he took down a maze game from the bookshelf behind him and opened it on the desk. "The incident inspired me to create this puzzle."

"You were hired to kill the man?" Leopold asked.

"I was hired to remove him, by one means or another. The house had been reinforced to make it virtually bombproof, you see, and the maze itself was guarded with electric-eye beams to warn if anyone entered it. He kept a staff of armed servants to guard against siege, and he never left the place except to walk the grounds each day safely inside the maze. A service road at the back of the house was kept sealed by iron gates. How, Captain Leopold, would you have gone about killing such a man?"

"I solve murder cases, I don't plan them."

"Still, as an exercise in tactics you might consider this one."

"Land a helicopter inside the grounds."

"There was no room for one, since the maze came up almost to the walls of the house."

"Bribe a servant."

"They were loyal to him unto death. They had served together during the war."

"Shoot him from a plane while he's out for his daily walk."

"He quickly retreated at the sound of approaching aircraft. And the house, as I have said, was quite resistant to most bombs."

"Poison his food supply before it reaches the house."

"The servants would eat it first, as tasters did for kings of old."

Leopold walked to the window and looked out at the park across the street. Seeing the children playing there, watching them run along the paths to the center fountain, brought him back to the reality of the world. He had not come here to play games with Jules Dermain, and this book-lined study with its boxed puzzles was a long way from the hotel room where Abby Tenyon had suffered her torment.

"Tell me," he said at last. "Tell me your secret of the maze."

"Ah, you are giving up so easily?"

"Tell me this one, so I might be better prepared to outwit you on the next."

"Spoken like a true puzzle fan! You delight me, Captain Leopold!"

The Irish matter is simply told. I happened to read that snakes can be trained to negotiate mazes. I photographed this maze from the air and built a duplicate out of boards. I trained three deadly black mambas to travel through the maze and strike at the first person they saw. The mamba was chosen because it is both fast and deadly. Of course the serpents could slither in beneath the electric-eye alarms, and since there are no snakes in Ireland as a rule, the victim had prepared no defense against such an attack. They were loosed at the hour of his daily walk. They sought him out within the maze and he died ten minutes later."

Leopold thought about that. "I don't believe a word of it," he said finally. "If I did, I'd consider you the most dangerous man alive."

Jules Dermain laughed heartily, shaking his small body. "You shouldn't believe it—of course not! Any more than you should believe I employed that man to beat Mrs. Tenyon! They're all games, played out in my mind. Go away now, Captain Leopold. It has been a pleasant hour, but I have other business."

Leopold nodded. There was nothing more for him here. But at the door he paused to ask, "How would someone go about killing *you*, Mr. Dermain?"

Another laugh. There was a television set at one side of the room, and Dermain stood against it as he answered. "You're not the first to ask that question, Captain. Of course I guard against it. My telephone and this office are constantly checked for listening devices. And I'm careful where I go. Still, it could be done. This video tape recorder on my television can be set to turn on up to a week in advance. If the tape cartridge contained a bomb instead of tape, it could destroy this entire building."

"Ever use that idea somewhere else?"

"Perhaps."

"We'll talk again," Leopold said.

"Come any time. I will tell you of an elderly corporate executive whose salary was such a drain on the company that we hastened his departure from this earth. And a United States Senator whose assassination was not quite what it seemed."

All the way back home Leopold was uneasy. The day had been a waste of time. Even if Dermain had conspired with Forsyth in the Tenyon affair, surely the rest of it was a myth. The man was a puzzle maker, not a master criminal who plotted assassinations halfway around the world. He'd spun a good yarn for Leopold and that was all.

But the memory of Jules Dermain still made him uneasy, and he wondered what he would do if he discovered it was all true.

As casually as possible he asked Connie Trent to run a check with the Dublin police. Had there ever been a case of murder by snakebite in Ireland, especially involving a man on a large country estate during the postwar years?

"There aren't supposed to be any snakes in Ireland," Connie protested. "St. Patrick drove them out."

"It was more likely due to the Ice Age and the fact that Ireland is surrounded by water. I'm sure you won't find anything, but check on it anyway."

"Is this connected with the Tenyon case?" She knew he'd gone to New York about that.

"In a way, yes."

He plunged into the other cases that called for his attention and he'd managed to put Jules Dermain almost out of his mind when Connie reported back two days later. "Here's that report from the Dublin police, Captain. You asked me to check with them."

"They didn't have anything, right?"

"On the contrary. A German named Von Buff, suspected of being a former Nazi, was killed by black mamba snakes at his country estate in Cork in 1958. No one ever explained how the snakes got there. The house was surrounded by a maze of hedges."

"Yes, I know," Leopold said, feeling suddenly light-headed. It couldn't be, but it was.

"The guards killed the snakes."

"I'm sure they did."

"Are you all right, Captain?"

"Fine. I'm fine."

When he was alone Leopold thought about a course of action. He considered phoning the New York police, but he really didn't know what he could tell them. Jules Dermain had committed no crime in New York that Leopold was aware of—unless perhaps it was conspiracy.

In the end he did nothing.

It was about a week later when Ron Tenyon came to see him. He sat in the uncomfortable wooden chair opposite Leopold's desk and said, "I want to know about the investigation into Abby's beating."

"You know what there is to know. The grand jury has indicted Carl Forsyth and we have every reason to believe he'll plead guilty.

His lawyer, Samuel Judge, has been plea bargaining with the D.A.'s office."

"So what will he get? Two years? Three?"

"It's a third offense. He could go away for a long time."

"And what about the man who hired him?"

"He was hired by pro-casino money out to defeat you. But I guess that's no surprise."

"It's a surprise to hear it like that. Do you have their names?"

Leopold pondered how much to tell him. "I have the name of one man, but nothing we can use in court."

"Why not?"

"Because the man is clever. He might be the most clever criminal I've ever encountered."

"A master criminal like Professor Moriarty?" Tenyon smiled as he said it. Leopold had not seen him smile since the attack on his wife.

"Something like that," Leopold replied in all seriousness. "We don't like to admit they exist, because they rarely get caught. Today's master criminal isn't usually concerned with planning bank heists or mob killings. He's far more interested in pulling off a commodities swindle or falsifying the ownership of a tanker full of crude oil. The man I speak of is especially dangerous because he puts his talent at the disposal of anyone who can pay his price. The men who wanted to defeat you could pay."

"Losing the election was one thing. What they did to Abby was something else. I can never forgive that."

"How is she?"

"Her face is pretty well healed, but that's only part of it. Even our friends look at us a bit oddly now. Every time Abby gets a bruise someone will remember the stories that went around, and they'll forget that Forsyth was arrested for beating her."

Leopold was silent for a time. Then he reached a decision and said, "After what you've been through I guess I owe you some information." He told Tenyon about Jules Dermain. "That's the sort of man we're up against. I checked the Irish story and it's true."

Ron Tenyon thought about that, his face lined with concern. "As long as you can't touch him, he's free to do this sort of thing again, to continue plotting the maiming and killing."

"Oh, yes," Leopold admitted. "But what can we do about it?"

"Do? We can stop him!"

"How? By killing him ourselves?"

Tenyon's face was very serious. "Why not?"

Never in his life had Leopold seriously considered killing a person, except in the line of duty and then always in self-defense. There was a brief scandal once when he'd been accused of killing his former wife, but even in the depths of it, knowing how much the woman had hated him; he never entertained the idea that he could have taken her life. The law was an important institution to him, and he was sworn to uphold it. Even a man like Jules Dermain must be protected.

"I want to meet Dermain," Ron Tenyon told him the following day. "I've thought it all out and I want to meet him."

"Do you now? So you can pull out a little pistol and avenge your wife?"

"If it's the only way to stop a man like that."

"You're not meeting him. It would accomplish nothing."

"If you won't go with me, I'll go alone."

"That's out of the question. I'm sorry I told you as much as I did."

"I have to confront him," Tenyon said. "If I don't do it, Abby will."

"You told her about it?"

He nodded. "Last night. With me it's the fact that he had her beaten. With Abby it's what he did to me and to my chances in the election. She wants revenge for that, and I can't say I blame her. If the police are helpless I have to do something myself."

Leopold could see the man was serious. "I can't stand by while you do violence to him. I can't even condone a punch in the nose, though I might look the other way."

"Arrange a meeting. Tell him I have to see him."

"Do I have your promise there'll be no violence?"

Ron Tenyon hesitated, running a damp hand through his thinning hair.

"All right, if that's what it takes. You have my promise."

"What are you going to say to him?"

"Even if Dermain planned it, I want the men who paid him to do it. They may be unimportant names, but I want those names. I'm prepared to pay for them."

"I'll see what I can do," Leopold promised.

He telephoned Jules Dermain later that afternoon. The Frenchman was friendly but guarded on the phone. There was no talk of mambas in Ireland or beatings in hotel rooms—not when he could assume his conversation was being recorded. "What can I do for you

today, Captain?" he asked after some preliminary remarks about the weather.

"Ron Tenyon wants to meet you. He asked me to arrange it."

"Oh? I don't really see that any good could be served by such a meeting."

"He has a business proposition to offer you."

A dry chuckle came over the line. "Really, now, you can't expect me to agree to such a thing."

"If you're concerned about recording devices, the meeting could be held outdoors," Leopold suggested. "That fountain in the park across the street could effectively muffle conversation."

"What's your interest in all this?" the Frenchman asked.

It was a good question, and one that Leopold couldn't answer with complete satisfaction. "Maybe I'm trying to prevent a murder," he replied.

There was another laugh. "I trust you, Captain. If you accompany Tenyon I'll meet the two of you tomorrow noon, at the fountain across from my house."

Leopold met Tenyon at the railroad station shortly before nine o'clock. The express into New York took 90 minutes, and they wanted to be on time. "I told Abby about it," Tenyon said. "She wanted to come along."

"It's better to keep her away. I don't know what we'll be getting into."

"I promise to behave myself," Tenyon said.

"But I wonder about Jules Dermain. He didn't make any promises."

They talked little during the train trip to New York, though Tenyon did speak of his future plans a bit. "George Crystal is a lightweight. Two years of him and the public will be ready for a change. I just might run again."

"You're sounding more optimistic than you did the other day."

"I've had time to think."

"Do you really believe George Crystal is the name Dermain will give you?"

Tenyon's head came up. "Did I say that?"

"You didn't have to. Crystal is the man to beat and you're going to New York today to start your campaign. It's not even two years—he'll have to run again in the next regular election, in eighteen months. But tell me—what changed you? When this thing first

happened to you and Abby it was the casino interests behind it—not George Crystal.”

“He profited from it. He can take some of the blame for it.”

“There’s enough blame to spread around,” Leopold agreed. “Just make sure he deserves the part he gets.”

When the train finally arrived at Grand Central, it was a bright May morning with the temperature well into the sixties. “It’s not too far,” Leopold said. “Want to walk?”

“Why not?”

They were still early when they reached Stuyvesant Park. Leopold pointed out Jules Dermain’s house and considered presenting himself at the door. But if the Frenchman was nervous about their visit that would only increase his suspicions. Better to wait for his arrival at the fountain.

There were a few children at play, watched over by mothers or nursemaids, and an illegally unleashed dog made the rounds of the litter barrels situated at each of the two park entrances. “Looking down on this from Dermain’s second-floor office, it seems a little like one of his game boards,” Leopold observed. “An entrance on the east and west sides, the fountain in the middle. I could almost imagine wooden chessmen moving along the paths.”

“He probably sits in there and plots his assassinations on it.”

“I’d like to—”

Leopold stopped speaking. Though it was only twenty to twelve, the door of Dermain’s brownstone had opened and he was emerging.

“Is that him?”

“That’s him,” Leopold confirmed.

Jules Dermain paused at his door to unlock the mailbox and extract a single slim envelope. He seemed puzzled by it but placed it in his inside pocket unopened. Then he came down the steps and crossed the street to the park. His brownstone was in midblock, facing south, so he had to walk around to one or the other park entrance. He hesitated an instant before choosing the one on the east side. “Shall we go meet him?” Tenyon suggested.

“No. I told him we’d speak by the fountain, so the sound of the water would help protect him against listening devices.”

They watched Dermain strolling along the edge of the park toward the entrance. He did not look at them, and anyone watching would have thought he was only out for a casual walk.

He’d almost reached the entrance when Leopold gripped Tenyon’s arm. “Isn’t that your wife over there?”

"My God—Abby!"

It was indeed Abby Tenyon. She'd materialized from somewhere, striding purposefully across the grass to intercept the path the Frenchman would be taking once he entered the park. Leopold could see her right hand go into her purse just as Tenyon shouted. "*Abby! Don't!*"

Leopold waited no longer. He sprang forward, trying to get to her in time. She'd reached the path and was standing in the center of it, facing the open gate where Jules Dermain was just entering. Her purse had dropped to the ground and she held a small automatic pistol firmly in both hands, pointing it at arm's length directly at Dermain.

The Frenchman saw the pistol too, as he started into the park. Then everything seemed frozen in Leopold's vision as he tried to reach her.

Behind him Tenyon was shouting. Ahead, Abby Tenyon took aim.

Then Leopold hit her, lunging into her back just as the pistol went off. He saw its flash aimed at the sky and knew he'd reached her in time.

Knew, and yet froze again watching Jules Dermain as he vanished in a flash of fire.

Leopold hit the ground on top of Abby as a clap of thunder shook the park, echoing off the brownstones around the park. Then there was smoke and flying bits of wood and metal and flesh.

Finally, after a moment that lasted an eternity, Leopold lifted himself to his knees and stared toward the gate.

The litter barrel had exploded as Jules Dermain passed by. Where he and it had stood there was now only a hole in the earth.

The New York police blocked off the area as they searched for clues and the scattered remains of Jules Dermain's body. Even though he'd seen it happen, Leopold couldn't avoid the suspicion that the whole thing was some final trick of the puzzle master. Perhaps he'd been so frank in his meeting with Leopold because he planned exactly this sort of grand exit—a double to die in his place while he flew off to the easy life in South America.

New York City's bomb squad was represented by a calm, laconic man named Sergeant Phillips who went about his job with an assurance that brought admiration from a fellow professional like Leopold. "You say the lady fired the gun at the same time the bomb went off?" he asked.

"That's right. See any connection?"

Phillips was stooping over the twisted remains of the metal litter barrel. He seemed to be sniffing the air near the ground. "Plastic explosives in the barrel. Could have been set off by a sound-activated device but that's pretty doubtful. Too dangerous—a backfire might do it. Besides, if she was out there with the gun anyway, she could just as easily have shot him."

Leopold suggested the other possibilities to the man. "It might have been a double."

"We've got the fingers on one hand. We can check it soon enough."

"Any chance it could be suicide?"

The bomb squad man shrugged. "Hell of a way to kill yourself, but we've seen it happen."

"He had admitted some criminal activities to me during a prior meeting. He might have feared arrest."

Sergeant Phillips grunted. He was working a portion of scorched clothing from the remains of the dead man. Finally he abandoned the gruesome task and stood up to survey the scene. "Couldn't have been set off by a trip-wire," he decided. "Too many kids playing in the area. Probably a radio signal, which means the killer had to be nearby."

Leopold's thoughts went back again to Ron Tenyon and his wife. He could see them across the street, being questioned by detectives. Leopold himself had undergone questioning too, but they'd accepted his credentials and allowed him to remain on the scene. "Wait a minute," he said suddenly. "There's something wrong here. Dermain's house is across the street, in mid-block. When he started over here to meet us, he had a choice of either entrance. How could the killer possibly know which one he'd use?"

Phillips shrugged again. "Habit."

"No, I saw Dermain hesitate before coming the way he did. Would a killer this clever risk spoiling his plot because his victim turned right instead of left?"

The sergeant was suddenly interested. "You're saying—?"

"I'm saying let's take a look at the trash barrel at the west entrance."

Leopold reached it first and gingerly removed a crumpled newspaper and assorted litter. Underneath, resting in the bottom of the barrel, was a large package wrapped in plain brown paper. "Good hunch," Phillips said. "That's it."

The bomb experts carefully transported it to a truck with a cov-

ered-wagon look, made of woven steel cables that had the appearance of wicker from a distance. Later, when the package had been opened and the detonator removed from the mound of plastic explosives inside, Phillips came back to Leopold holding it in his hand.

"What do you make of it, Sergeant?"

"Radio-activated, as I suspected, but very short range." He turned the metal part over in his hand.

"A hundred feet?"

"No, no—more like ten feet."

"But the killer couldn't have been that close!" Leopold protested. "Even Abby Tenyon wasn't that close!"

One of Phillips's men came up to them. "We found it, Sergeant," he said, holding out a little plastic evidence bag containing a round metal disc about the size of a dime.

"Good." Phillips took the bag and showed it to Leopold. "The latest thing in electronic detonating devices. One of these was used in a recent Middle East assassination. It was attached magnetically to the victim's car fender, and when the car passed a second vehicle loaded with plastic explosives both of them were blown up."

"Where did you find it?" Leopold asked the man.

"Breast pocket of the victim's coat, inside a badly scorched envelope."

"Of course! The letter!" Leopold remembered Dermain's puzzlement at the letter in the mailbox. "Can you read any of it?"

"Seems to be an order for games."

"From a fictitious address, no doubt."

Sergeant Phillips nodded. "Have the lab work on it."

"That's why Dermain seemed puzzled—because he wasn't expecting a mail delivery at that time. No doubt the postman had been there earlier. But the bomber couldn't risk the uncertainties of the mail service. The letter must have been put in the box by the killer himself, who knew Dermain would see it and remove it as he left the house to meet me in the park."

"A clever man to anticipate Dermain's movements like that."

Leopold nodded. "A puzzle master—as good as Jules Dermain himself."

"Are we back to the suicide theory?"

"No, no. If Dermain had committed suicide we wouldn't have found explosives in that second barrel. He'd have known which way to walk."

It was later in the day, after the fingerprints had finally confirmed

Dermain's death, that Leopold found a chance to speak with Abby Tenyon on the train back to Connecticut. "Why did you try to kill Jules Dermain this morning, Abby? Your face is healed now. Your husband is talking of running in the next election. What could you hope to accomplish? Was revenge that important to you?"

"Revenge? No, not revenge." She was staring out the window. "I had to do it for Ron. I had to kill that man before Ron did it and ruined his life forever."

"A self-sacrificing motive for murder! A noble intent, though I can hardly approve of it. In any event, someone else did the job for you."

She took a deep breath and said, "God, I hope so," and in that instant Leopold knew she suspected her husband of the murder.

The killing of Jules Dermain was a three-day wonder in the New York press before it was supplanted by a brutal subway slaying. Since the investigation was not the responsibility of Captain Leopold he lost track of it within a week. Of more local concern was the indictment of Carl Forsyth by the county grand jury on charges of felonious assault. The arraignment was held at ten o'clock on the first Monday morning in June, and Leopold was there with Lieutenant Fletcher. They sat in the back of the courtroom watching while Forsyth stood next to his lawyer, Samuel Judge, and pleaded guilty to the charge. The judge ordered sentencing for June 24th and court was adjourned.

"That was fast," Fletcher said.

Leopold, whose mind had wandered during the court session, was surprised it was over. "What happened?"

"He pleaded guilty. Were you taking a little nap, Captain?"

"No, I was thinking of the most amazing thing."

"What was that?"

"Remember how this all began, Fletcher? Remember that day you arrested Forsyth and he tried to take a shot at you?"

"How could I forget?"

"You knocked the gun from his hand and broke a bone doing it."

"Sure. It was all bandaged up while we were questioning him."

Leopold was on his feet. "There might be a few people in this world who are ambidextrous, but most of us are either right- or left-handed, aren't we?"

Fletcher looked puzzled. "Is this some sort of quiz show, Captain?"

But Leopold was hurrying on, speaking quickly as he moved down

the row of seats to the aisle. "It's one of the oddities of our modern civilization, Fletcher, that a person generally uses the same hand to fire a gun and hold a pencil. If you broke Forsyth's gun hand you also broke his writing hand."

"So?"

"So he couldn't have written Jules Dermain's name and address so neatly on that piece of paper Samuel Judge gave me."

He'd reached the aisle now, just in time to intercept the portly lawyer.

"Well, Captain Leopold! Good to see you again!"

"Good to see you too, Mr. Judge. I think the New York police might be even more pleased to see you—and to arrest you for the murder of Jules Dermain."

Samuel Judge stood quietly while Leopold informed him of his rights. Then he walked between Leopold and Fletcher along the covered passageway that connected the county courthouse with police headquarters.

"He's not saying a word," Fletcher said when he came back from booking the lawyer.

"He's a smart attorney. If the people we pick up on the streets ever learn to keep their mouths shut we'll be in big trouble."

"You really think he arranged that bombing?"

"I know it, Fletcher. Look at it this way. The bomber had to possess an important piece of information—the fact that Dermain had agreed to meet us at the fountain at noon on the day in question. Otherwise the twin bombs in the trash baskets and the ideally timed letter in the mailbox would make no sense. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"The only ones who knew of that meeting were myself and Ron Tenyon—who unfortunately also told his wife about it. Three people. You and Connie knew about the meeting, but not the details of time and place. I could certainly eliminate myself, and I could also eliminate Abby Tenyon. There was no need for the scene with the gun if she'd already arranged to kill him. Ron Tenyon was another matter, but I quickly eliminated him. He might have slipped down to the city the previous night to plant those bombs, but the letter had to have been left in the mailbox that morning—shortly before our arrival."

"Why's that?"

"If the letter was there at, say, nine o'clock, Dermain might have

found it earlier and brought it inside. Once opened, it was no good. He certainly wouldn't carry the miniature radio transmitter with him to the park, even if he thought it was only a metal disc. No, we must assume a clever and thoughtful murderer. Thus we must assume the letter was left in the box late that morning. And Ron Tenyon was never out of my sight."

"So who does that leave?"

"No one. I asked myself next if Dermain's phone could have been tapped, but here again the answer was no. He told me on the day of our meeting that his phone and office were constantly checked against listening devices."

"Then the thing's impossible!"

"No, it isn't. One possibility remains—that Jules Dermain himself informed his killer of the time and place of the meeting."

"Why would he do that?"

"It would be the most natural thing in the world, if the killer was the person who engaged Dermain's services originally—the nameless casino interests who were behind this whole thing. And that brings us back up here. The note that gave me Dermain's name and address was written here—not by Carl Forsyth, as I've shown, but by the person who was alone with Forsyth at the time. His lawyer, Samuel Judge. It was Judge who wrote the note, and I suspect it was Judge who hired Forsyth in the first place. Who'd have a better knowledge of ex-convicts working in local hotels—a puzzle maker in Manhattan or a criminal lawyer here in town?"

"Then what did Dermain have to do with the scheme?"

"Judge came to him for the idea, but it was Judge who hired Forsyth to carry it out. When we arrested Forsyth, he must have been close to breaking and implicating Judge. We had to be given a name, any name, so he gave us Jules Dermain. He figured Dermain was beyond reach and beyond arrest. He didn't realize the Frenchman was at a stage of life where he'd begin to brag about past triumphs to the first person who'd listen. When he phoned Judge to say I was coming down again, this time with Ron Tenyon, and that Tenyon had a deal for him, Judge decided Jules Dermain had to die. And he put his mind to it as cleverly as Dermain might have. Who knows—maybe one day when they were together Dermain looked out the window and suggested to Judge the very method of his own murder. He did something of the sort with me regarding a bomb attached to a videotape machine."

"Judge did it himself?"

"Or else found another ex-convict willing to carry out his plan. Start checking local people with records for bombings. Meanwhile I'm going to talk with Forsyth. He hasn't been sentenced yet and now that we know about Judge he might be willing to talk in return for a lighter jail term. We want to hit Samuel Judge with enough evidence so he'll be crying to the New York District Attorney for plea bargaining."

In the end they had more than they needed, included Dermain's carefully coded records of payments made to him by Samuel Judge and others. And Leopold, remembering his sole meeting with the little Frenchman, could feel in a special way that he'd solved the puzzle master's final challenge.



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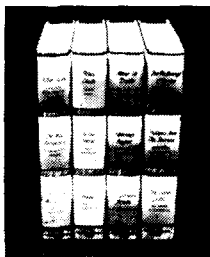
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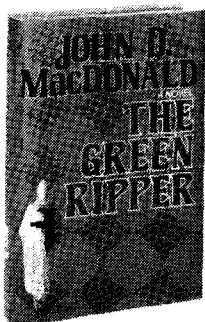
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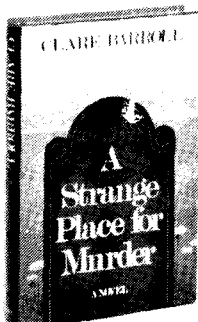
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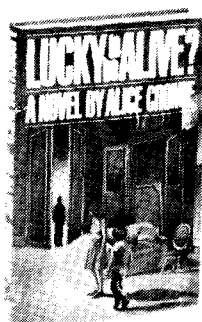
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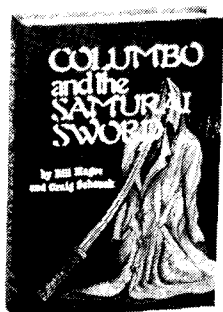
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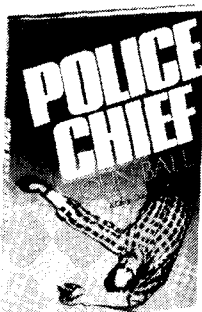
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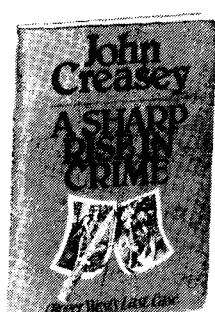
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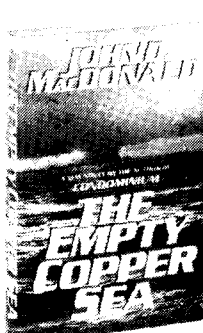
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